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Chapter 1: Ancient Yemen In The Qur'an

The story of Yemen as a region of the Arabian peninsula is one of great tradition and culture. Much of this tradition was circulated and retold amongst the Arab peoples by the priests of religion, soothsayers, poets, tradesmen who travelled to distant lands and tribal leaders. Many of these stories were moral tales or lessons to be imparted to a community eager to exchange learnings and compete for religious and tribal rites.

The Qur'an states,

"Indeed We have sent messengers to every community" (Surah al-Nahl, 16:36).

"We have not sent a messenger except in the language of the people, so that they may make (the message) clear to them." (Surah Ibrahim, 14:4).

The fact is that stories and lessons of the great events of Yemen were discussed and debated so vigorously across Arabia by a community that were skilled in the arts of memorisation and were also weaved into a story through the art of composing beautiful poetry for competition, and in addition, the Holy Qur'an also sought to eternalise these stories in its revelation.

To some people, these were just "stories of the ancients" from another soothsayer prophet, aiming to take the tribes away from their system of living and worship of idols. However, the reality was that Yemen had an intimate and profound past with prophets, miracles and great communities of faith and denial; these could not be lost to poetry or storytelling, but it required recording and understanding so that the people of Arabia and the world could take lessons from them.

The fact that the inhabitants of the Hijazi had heard about these great prophets, retained their stories and had even travelled to the places of their histories meant that the earliest recipients of the Qur'an felt that revelation was speaking to them about their own communities and forefathers; peoples whom they had traded and intermarried with. Yemen's history was their history and vice versa. It also enlivened the entire region of Yemen to know that their land was the subject of revelation and that a prophet was

recounting their history with so much depth and accuracy, such that had even been lost by their own great storytellers. This piqueed the interest of many thousands of Yemeni's who eventually sent their delegations to the Prophet (S) and received delegations from him.

In light of this, our story of Yemen starts with the some of the verses of the Qur'an that speak about this region, its ancient prophets, tribes and events. We will recount the narratives of The People of Sheeba, the Prophets Hud ('a) and Salih ('a), and 'The Story of The Year of The Elephant' as mentioned in the Qur'an. As these stories require some explanations, we will also mention the relevant exegesis (*tafsir*) to the stories, however owing to the fact that this work is a brief history of Yemen, the commentaries will be limited. For those wishing to research further, they may refer to other commentaries and hadith literature.

The People Of Sheeba (Sabas)

Surah Saba (Chapter 34) - Verses 15-19

Indeed there was a sign for the (people of) Sheeba in their abode, two gardens on the right and the left; Eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him (that you have) a pure city and a forgiving Lord. (34:15)

Sabas is the name of the cultivated land of Yemen. This name, Sabas, had been the name of a great personality in that region that was chosen for this land. The biography of this country is instructive.

After the statement of the great bounties that Allah had bestowed upon the prophets Dawud (David) ('a) and Sulayman (Solomon) ('a) and that these two Divinely–sent prophets acted on the duty of thanksgiving in the preceding verses, verse fifteen refers to another nation who was in a state opposite to them, and they lived perhaps in the same time with them or a little after them.

The people of Sheeba were people whom Allah had granted various kinds of blessings to, but they paved the way of disbelief, and consequently, Allah negated His blessings from them. Then they became so scattered that the story of their lives became a lesson and memorial for the people of the world.

The Qur'an has stated their instructive biography in five verses and it has pointed to some important details and specialties of their lives in these few verses. At first it says: "Indeed there was a sign for the (people of) Sheeba in their abode..." By utilizing the particular spatial conditions and situation of the mountainous region, the talented people could control the floods. What could have resulted in destruction was then avoided behind a strong dam which they led to building a habitable country.

This Divine sign, originating here from these people will be elaborated upon below, however it should be

noted what a great sign it was that a means of destruction was changed into a very important means of development.

Scholars are divided as to what Saba® was or whose name it referred to. A popular idea is that Saba® was the name of the father of the Arabs of Yemen. According to a tradition of the holy Prophet Muhammad (S), there was a man by the name of Saba®, from whom ten children were born, and from every one of them a tribe from the tribes of the Arabs came into being in that land. Some people believe that Saba® was the name of the land of Yemen, or a part of it. The apparent meaning of the Qur'an in the story of Prophet Sulayman ('a) and the hoopoe in Surah al–Naml, verse 22, also shows that Saba® had been the name of a place, where it says: "…and I have come to you from Sheeba with a sure tiding."(27:22)

The situation here is that the apparent meaning of the verse shows that Saba had been a group of people who lived in that region, because the plural masculine pronoun, 'hum' has returned to them. There is no inconsistency between these two commentaries because it may be that at first Saba® had been the name of a person, then all of his offspring and his tribe were entitled by that name, and later this name was also used for their land.

Then the Qur'an refers to the explanation of this Divine sign which was given to the people of Saba®. It says: "...two gardens in the right and the left..." The story was such that the people of Saba®, by building a great dam between the magnificent mountains of that region, could store the water from the numerous floods which would have caused destruction or at least would have been wasted in the deserts vainly, at the back of that great dam; and by creating some windows in the dam they could take the vast store of water behind it under their own control. Thus, they succeeded to plant and grow different things in the vast lands over there.

These gardens were so bountiful of fruits and blessings that as history indicates, if a person put a large basket on his head and at the season of fruits, one passed under these trees there he would get so much fruit in it that after a short time the basket would be filled with fruits. Is it not wonderful that a flood which is the source of destruction becomes the cause of cultivation? Is it not counted as a sign of Allah? In addition, an extraordinary security existed in that land which itself was counted as one of the signs of Allah. This fact will later be referred to in the Qur'an.

Then the verse says that Allah told them as follows: "... Eat of the sustenance from your Lord and give thanks to Him (that you have) a pure city and a forgiving Lord." This short sentence has reiterated a collection of material and spiritual bounties in the most beautiful form. From the point of material bounties, they had a pure and clean land. It was clean from the various pollutions: from thieves and unjust people, from pests and afflictions, from drought and famine, and from insecurity and terror. It has even been said that their land was clean from harmful insects, as well. Their town had clean air, a pleasant enlivening breeze, and a fertile land with productive trees. From the point of spiritual bounties, they had the forgiveness of Allah. He would overlook their short-comings and faults and did not punish

them, and He did not involve their land in misfortune.

But they turned away (from Allah), so We sent upon them the Flood of 'arim, and We gave them in exchange for their two gardens, two gardens bearing bitter produce and tamarisk-bushes, and (here and there) a few lote-trees. (34:16)

Through this verse, the Qur'an implicitly says that instead of being thankful to Allah, they turned away from Him. They counted the bounties of Allah as insignificant. They considered the cultivation and security of their land very simple; and forsaked the affluence of bounties and became neglectful of the remembrance of Allah. Their rich people boasted to the poor and imagined them as bothersome for their own status. The explanation of this will be dealt with in the commentary of later verses.

It was here that the lash of punishment was whipped on their bodies, as the Qur'an says: "But they turned away (from Allah), so We entered upon them the flood of 'arim..."

The Arabic term 'arim is derived from 'aramah in the sense of harshness, ill-temper, and strictness; and since flood is modified by it, this points to its harshness and destructiveness. The application of the phrase sayl al-'arim (the flood of 'arim) is so to speak, a kind of addition to emphasise the harshness of the flood.

Some commentators have rendered the Arabic term 'arim into field–mice which as a result of making holes in this dam, caused its destruction. The Arabic dictionary, Lisan al-'Arab introduces different meanings about the Arabic term 'arim including: 'a tiresome flood, barriers which are built between valleys for stopping water, and also a big field–mouse'.

Then the Qur'an explains the later situation of this land as follows: "...and We gave them in exchange for their two gardens, two gardens bearing bitter produce and tamarisk-bushes, and here and there a few lote-trees." The Qur'anic word ukul means any kind of victuals. The Arabic term xamt means a bitter plant. The Arabic word athl is in the sense of 'tamarisk-bush.' Therefore, instead of those masses of green trees, there remained only a few wild, and deserted trees with a very low value that perhaps, the most important of them was lote-tree a few of which were found among them.

The statement of these three kinds of trees which remained in that ruined region refers to three different groups of trees: a part of which were harmful, some of them were useless, and some of them were of very little benefit. On the whole they had their turning away, ingratitude and Divine punishment as a sequel, of: flood, earthquake, tempest, thunder and lightning, and these were not casual or natural events in this sense.

ذَّلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا ١٠ وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ

This We recompensed them for their disbelief; and do We ever recompense any but the ungrateful? (34:17)

The Divine retributions were Allah's (SwT) way of punishment and a Godly law against evil doers, and they are not exclusive to the people of Sheeba. As a conclusion, this verse explicitly implies that this was a chastisement that Allah (SwT) gave them for their own infidelity. The verse says: "*This We recompensed them for their disbelief...*"

But in order that no one considers that this fate belongs to only this group, but it is generally for all of those who have similar actions is certain, it says: "...and do We ever recompense any but the ungrateful?"

And We made between them and the towns which We had blessed (other) towns to be easily seen and between them We had appointed stages of journey in due proportion: 'Travel therein secure, by night and by day.' And they said: 'O our Lord! Place longer distances between our journeys'; and they were unjust to themselves, so We made them stories and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments. Verily in this there are signs for every patient, grateful one. (34: 18–19)

Ingratitude Causes The Destruction Of A Person's Life

Through these two verses the Qur'an returns again to the story of the people of Sheeba and explains their story in some more detailed explanation. It refers to their punishment bigger than before and in such a way that it can be an important and instructive lesson for everyone.

It implies that Allah made their land so cultivated that not only He caused their cities to become full of bounties but also He appointed between them and the cities that Allah had blessed some other manifest cities.

The verse says, "And We made between them and the towns which We had blessed (other) towns apparent..." In fact, between them and the blessed land there were some towns joined together like a chain, and the distances between these towns were so little that from each of them the other town could be easily seen; and this is the meaning of the Qur'anic phrase: qurr'an zahirah (towns apparent).

Some of the commentators have rendered this phrase in another way. They say that it refers to the

towns which were just manifestly alongside the way and passengers could comfortably stay in them. Or that these towns were upon some high places and they were apparent for the wayfarers to see.

As for the location of 'these blessed towns' which ever towns they may be, most commentators have rendered it as the towns of old Syria, since this meaning has been mentioned about this land in Surah al–Isra' (chapter 17), verse 1, and in Surah al–Anbiya' (chapter 21), verse 81. But some other commentators say that its area may be the towns of Sana®a or Ma'arib – both of which were located in the region of Yemen. This commentary is more likely because the distance between Yemen, which is located in the most southern point of Arabia; and Shamat (Syria), which is located in the most northern point and had been covered with some dry and hot deserts, makes the first explanation of the verse seem very improbable.

Some commentators also believe that the blessed lands may be the land of Mecca, but this is improbable as well. This explanation was from the point of cultivation, but since cultivation only is not enough, and security is an important and basic condition, the verse adds, "...and between them We had appointed stages of journey in due proportion..." The verse continues and we read, "...Travel therein secure, by night and by day."

Therefore, the towns had an appropriate distance, and from the point of the attack of wild and fearsome animals of the desert, or thieves and robbers, they were also in utmost security in a manner that people could travel between them without having any provision or any mount. They did not need to travel in groups and use some armed persons with them because of fear of insecurity on the way nor distress for a lack of water and food along the way.

Based on the phrase "*travel therein*" there are two probabilities: one of them is that it was conveyed to them by their prophet, and the other is that the mute tongue of that cultivated land and its secure and safe roads was a means of conveying the message to them.

Preceding the word *layali* before *ayyam* in the verse is for the sake of the importance of the existence of security at nights – both security from the point of thieves on the way, and also the wild animals of the desert.

Through the next verse, the holy Qur'an implies that these ingratitudes of the people in the face of these great bounties, had thoroughly encompassed their whole living, like many other nations who lived in pleasure, but were involved in pride and negligence. This affluence of bounty and lack of want caused them to pave the way of ingratitude and they deviated from the path of truth and became heedless of the commands of Allah (SwT).

Among their demands was that they asked Allah (SwT) to appoint long distances between their journeys. The verse announces, "And they said: 'O our Lord! Place longer distances between our journeys'…"

Their purpose of asking this strange supplication was that they wanted Allah (SwT) to set a distance between their cultivated towns and that there would be some dry deserts between them. This was because the rich did not want to let the poor members of the community travel like them freely, without any provision or mount.

Travelling was among their boasts, and it was a sign of power and wealth, and they desired that this privilege and superiority be registered for them mainly. Comfort and welfare had made them complacent, the same way that *manna* and *salwa* (two heavenly foods) had made the Children of Israel tired, discontent and they asked Allah (SwT) for onion, garlic, and lentils.

Some have also understood that the sentence, "Place longer distances between our journeys" may point to the fact they had become so pleasure–seeking that they were not ready to travel for the purpose of breeding livestock or merchandise and agriculture, and they asked Allah (SwT) that they would always remain at home and the time between their journeys would be increased. But the first commentary is more correct.

Next to this short sentence which is stated about their painful fate, the Qur'an implies that Allah (SwT) punished them so seriously that it became a matter of talk for others. The verse says, "...so We made them stories..." This means that from that furnished living and glorious vast civilization, there remained nothing but some news talked by others, and a remembrance in the minds, and some lines written on the pages of histories!

The verse continues saying, "...and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments..." This accords to what was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter than ancient Yemen remained as stories and poetry as lessons to be learned.

Their region and town became so ruined that they did not have the ability of living there and in order to continue their lives, they had to go towards different places in different groups.

Like leaves in the season of fall which are in a current of storms, every one of them was thrown to a different corner in a manner that their division became a 'proverb,' and whenever people wanted to say that a group was severely scattered, they used to say, "Like the people of Sheba and their bounties, they have been scattered."

Some commentators said that the tribe of Qasan went to Syria, Asad went to Amman, the tribe of Khazasah went toward Tahamah, and the tribe of Anmar went to Yathrib. At the end of the verse, it says "... Verily in this there are signs for every patient, grateful one."

So how can the patient and grateful ones take lessons from these events? The holy Qur'an uses the Arabic words: *sabbar* (patient) and *shakur* (thankful) both are in the Arabic amplification form which indicates a statement of repetition and emphasis. This is achieved by controlling insatiable desires by means of patience and perseverance, and by giving thanks which is best established by obeying Allah

(SwT) and reflecting on how these verses apply to our lives in the contemporary contexts.

In regard to the subject on the story of Yemen, we find that in these verses, much of its history is appreciated, from the perspectives of its tribes, cultivations, attitudes, challenges and the reasons for its scatterings to various parts of Arabia. It is from here that new communities flourished and were also given great blessings, which we will now explore in the stories of the tribes of Ad and Thamud.1

The Tribes Of SAd And Thamud

Surah Al-Fajr (Chapter 89) - Verses 6-9

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with (the tribe of)

Ad? (Surah al-Fajr, 89:6).

The term *tara* – 'see' here means 'know or understand,' but since the story of these sects were so clear and known to all, it seems that the people of the later generations had also been able to see them with their own eyes, or at least the remnants of them. In this verse of course the addressee is Prophet Muhammad (S) primarily, but the warning is for everyone. The people of ¶Ad with their Prophet Hud ('a), are as some historians believe, mentioned separately in two groups:

- 1. The first group lived in very ancient times and they are called in the Qur'an, 'ad-al-ula, (the early generation of ⑤Ad) who probably used to live in prehistory and;
- 2. A remnant from the former group, also known by the name ①Ad, existed during recorded history, which may be about 700 B.C.; and they lived in Ahqaf, Yemen at the southern end of the Red Sea. These people were tall and strong in stature, and likewise they were considered excellent fighters. Moreover, they were very advanced in their material civilization, having lofty buildings in large cities with cultivated lands of verdant fields and luxuriant gardens.

Some others say that **Ad** is the name of an ancestor of the people, and a tribe was usually called by the name of its ancestor.

Of the (city of) Iram with lofty pillars. (Surah al-Fajr, 89:7).

Opinions are divided about the name 'Iram' as to whether it is the name of a person, a sect or a city.

In his book al-Kashshaf, Mahmud al-Zamakhshari cites from some others that **1**Ad was a son of **1**Aus

(Uz), the son of Iram (A'ram), the son of Sham (Shem), the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah); and since the name of the ancestor of a tribe was used for the tribe, the Ad people were also called Iram. Others believe that Iram is the same as 'ad-al-ula (the early generation of Ad) and that Ad is the second group of people. There are others who believe that Iram is the name of a city or the land where they lived, corresponding with the following verse. It is most likely that Iram is the name of their matchless city as per the apparent meaning of verse 8.

The term 'imad means 'pillar' whose plural form is 'umood. According to the first commentary it points to a strong pillar–like stature of the people of \P Ad; and taking the second commentary into consideration, it points to their great, lofty buildings with strong pillars – both of which illustrate the strength and the power of the people of \P Ad, but the second commentary, i.e., the great lofty pillars of their buildings is more appropriate.

That is why in the next verse, it says:

The like of which was not created among (other) cities? (Surah al-Fajr, 89:8).

The interpretation here shows that the meaning of Iram is 'a city' and does not mean a sect or tribe, and this may be why some great commentators have accepted that this is the correct commentary, and we have preferred it too.

Some of the commentators have told long stories about the recent excavated beautiful, supposed city of Iram in the deserts of Arabia, and the lands of Eden, speaking about its high, splendid buildings and its extraordinary jewellery. There is no doubt however that the people of ®Ad were the strongest and the most advanced people of their time and their cities were admired by others. As the Qur'an says, there was not any city like that among the other cities.

There are many stories told about Shaddad, who was a son of sAd and Shaddad's paradise. These stories are told by people and written in books so abundantly and frequently that 'his paradise' and 'the gardens of Iram' are used proverbially in the language, but they are all myths developed over time which have some roots in reality.

Then the Qur'an refers to the second group of transgressors of ancient times and says:

And the (people of) Thamud hewed out the (huge) rocks in the valley. (Surah al-Fajr, 89:9).

The Thamud were among the most ancient of people, and whose messenger and warner was Prophet Salih ('a). They lived in a land between Medina and Damascus named *wadi-al-qurra* and had an advanced civilized life with comfortable houses and lofty buildings. Some have said that Thamud was the name of the father of a tribe, and so they took their name from him. It is probable that there was some relation between the tribes of SAd and Thamud.

The term *jaabu* is originally from *jaubah* which means 'low land,' so it is used with the sense of 'to split, cleave, or cut out any piece of land.' An answer is called *jawaab* because it cleaves the air when it comes out from the mouth of a speaker and reaches the ears of the listener, or because it carves out a question and puts an end to it. In any case, here it means cutting the rocks of the mountains and making safe and sound houses as Surah al–Hijr says about the people of Thamud,

"Out of the mountains did they hew (their) edifices, (considering themselves) secure." (15:82)

Similar to this idea, it is also mentioned in Surah al-Shu'ara "And you hew houses out of the mountains exultingly," (26:149), but here the word farihin 'exultingly', is an evidence to show that they lived with pleasure and were making merry in those houses. Some have said that the Thamud were the first people who carved the rocks and produced firm houses inside the mountains for them to live in.

The term *wad*, which was originally *wadi*, means 'river bed or flood route' and sometimes it has been used with the meaning of 'valley' since the flood waters pass through valleys at the base of the mountains. Here the second meaning is more appropriate to explain the word, because it is understood about these people from the verses of the Qur'an and also from the above verse, which they used to build their houses in the mountain sides to make safer living quarters.

A tradition from Prophet Muhammad (S) says that on his way to the Northern part of Arabia, while riding on horseback for the battle of Tabuk, he reached the valley of Thamud and ordered the others to make haste, because they were in a cursed land.

Undoubtedly, the Thamud had an advanced civilization with grandiose cities in their time, but the descriptions written about them are exaggerated and mythical. For example, some commentators have written that they had 1,700 cities all made of stone.2

The Year Of The Elephant

Surah Al-Fil (Chapter 105)

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِنْ سِجِّيلِ فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفِ مَأْكُولٍ

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their stratagem go awry? And He sent upon them birds in flocks, Pelting them with stones of petrified clay, Thus He made them like straw eaten up. (105:1-5)

This chapter refers to the well-known historical event that happened in the year of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (S) when Allah (SwT) protected the Ka®bah against the attack of the army of pagans who riding on the backs of elephants, came from Yemen intending to destroy it. This surah is therefore a recollection and eternalization of the miraculous event which many people of Mecca had lived through and remembered, by its inclusion in revelation. It also worked as a means of confirmation that the Arabs would receive verses of truth and pertinence to their lives.

The remembrance of this event was a warning against the proud and arrogant pagans to make them aware that they have no power to stand in the way of the power of Allah, Who destroyed that great army of elephants by little, tiny birds which pelted them with 'small stones of petrified clay' – thus He could punish those stubborn oppressors as well.

The pagans of Mecca's equipment and power was no more than that of Abrahah, the Yemeni commander, nor did the number of their fighters even match his army. In other words, they had seen that event with their own eyes, and yet were willfully arrogant toward Allah (SwT). The chapter came as a reminder that Allah (SwT) will always protect His religion and cannot be defeated.

Dhu Nuwas, the king of Yemen, persecuted the Christians of Najran who lived there in order to force them to leave their faith. The Qur'an has pointed out with the terms of *ashab-i-ukhdud* 'the makers of the pit of Fire' in Surah al-Buruj (85), verses 4–10.

After that terrible massacre against the Christians mentioned in that chapter, a man by the name of Dus was able to escape and went to seek refuge with the Caesar of Rome, who was Christian, and described to him the event. Since there was a long distance between Rome and Yemen, Caesar wrote a letter to Najashi, the king of Ethiopia, advising him to take revenge for the massacre and sent a letter by the man himself.

Najashi prepared an army of about 70,000 men and sent them to Yemen under the leadership of Irbat. Abrahah was also one of the commanders of that army. The army invaded Yemen and before long defeated Dhu Nuwas, and Irbat became the ruler of Yemen. But, after a short time, Abrahah rose against him and killed him, and thus substituted Irbat.

The news reached Najashi who decided to punish Abrahah. Abrahah shaved the hair of his head and with some soil of Yemen sent to Najashi as a sign of complete submission and loyalty. When Najashi

understood the situation, he forgave him and retained him in his position.

Then to show his good behaviour and gratification, Abrahah built a great, beautiful, splendid church unsurpassed in the world at that time. After that he introduced it as the Ka®bah to the people of Arabia, instead of the real Ka®bah and decided to make it the centre for the Arab *Hajj* pilgrimage and to transfer the great central place of gatherings of Mecca to that place. For this purpose, he sent many preachers to different places among the Arab tribes in Arabia. But the Arabs who intensely loved Mecca and the Ka®bah and knew it as the greatest sign of Prophet Ibrahim ('a) the Khalil or 'Friend of Allah (SwT), felt endangered.

According to some narrations, a group of people secretly burned the church and according to other narrations some people desecrated it, and thus they showed their intense reaction against that vast invitation and discredited Abrahah's church.

Abrahah became very angry and decided to destroy the Ka®bah totally – both in order to take revenge, and to attract the Arabs to the new temple. He set out to invade Mecca with an army which consisted of soldiers and elephants.

Approaching the outskirts of Mecca, Abrahah's men captured 200 camels belonging to Abdul Muttalib ('a), the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (S). Abrahah sent a man to Mecca to find the supreme chief of Mecca and tell him about his intentions to destroy the Holy Kasbah, and inform the authorities that if they did not stand against him he would not kill anyone.

The man arrived in Mecca and looked for the chief of the city. Everyone showed Abdul Muttalib (a) to him and he gave him the message. Abdul Muttalib (a) said that they were not in a position to fight with them and the Kabah would be protected by Allah Himself.

The man told Abdul Muttalib ('a) that he should accompany him to see Abrahah. When Abdul Muttalib ('a) approached the military camp he was received respectfully, and Abrahah gave him an honourable seat near him and then he asked him about the purpose of his visit. Abdul Muttalib ('a) said that he had come to complain to Abrahah about the 200 camels that Abrahah's men had taken away and to request him to return his animals to him.

Abrahah was taken aback when Abdul Muttalib ('a) spoke like that. The conversation between the two is reported as follows: "What? I have come to destroy your place of worship the Kasbah, and you, instead of pleading to save the Holy House, speak about your camels?!"

Abdul Muttalib ('a) replied: "The camels belong to me, and I as the owner of the camels, have come for them. The Kasbah belongs to Allah and it is the concern of the Owner of the Kasbah to save it or to leave it to its fate in your hands." This statement shook Abrahah and he ordered that the camels be returned to sabdul Muttalib ('a).

■Abdul Muttalib ('a) returned to Mecca and advised the citizens to take refuge in the mountains around the city so as to be safe from being hurt by the invaders, and he himself, with a group of men went beside the Ka
■bah to pray to Allah and ask for help saying:

"O Lord! I have no hope [to be protected from them], except from You. O Lord! Withdraw You therefore Your protection from them. O Lord! Verily he who is the enemy of this House is Your enemy. Verily, they have not defeated Your forces."

Then SAbdul Muttalib ('a) went to the valleys around Mecca with a group of the Quraish and sent one of his sons over Abu–Qubays mountain to see what was happening. He returned and said that he had seen a black cloud coming from the Red Sea. SAbdul Muttalib ('a) became happy with that news and said: "O citizens of Quraish! Return to your houses because Allah has sent you His help."

This was the scene on one side. On the other side, when Abrahah while riding on his elephant by the name of Mahmood intended to destroy the Kasbah entered the city, a huge flock of tiny birds like a cloud, appeared in the sky; each bird with three small stones – as small as a pea, carrying one in its tiny beak and two in its claws. They dropped them on the invading soldiers and they were killed at once.

Abrahah tried to go forth on elephant-back, but the animal did not move until it turned its head and moved swiftly towards Yemen, and there Abrahah too died in San'a, the capital of Yemen.3

In these Qur'anic stories – the People of Sheeba, the tribes of ¶Ad and Thamud, and the story of the Year of the Elephant, the land of Yemen has been mentioned. Given its inclusion in the Qur'an, its role in pre–Islamic history, and the effect of it on the early Muslim community, there can be no doubt as to the importance and spiritual value of the land and people of Yemen.

It is also instructive that Allah (SwT) speaks about their people often in negative ways, the people destroyed there who ignored Divine blessings. Yet in the coming chapter, reviewing the people of Yemen and their interaction with Prophet Muhammad (S) and his praise of them means that he (S) left them while in a state of pleasure and appreciation of them. This means they learnt well from their own history and are an evidence of people who truly adopted the Qur'anic messages.

In the forthcoming chapter, we will address the tribes that sent delegations to the Prophet (S) and his sending emissaries to the people of Yemen. Their conversions took place on one day, and thereafter produced some of the most important companions in the history of Islam.

The Quraysh Known For Travel To Yemen

Surah Al-Quraysh, Verses 1-4

Surah al-Quraysh, Verses 1-44

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

For stabilizing and unifying the Quraysh, (We maintain for them) their trading caravans by winter and summer, So let them worship the Lord of this House (Ka'bah), Who fed them against hunger and secured them from fear. (106:1–4)

In the previous chapter (al-Fil) the story of the destruction of the possessors of the elephant and Abrahah's army, who came to Mecca intending to destroy the Ka'bah was related.

The first verse of this chapter joins the last verse of the previous and is a supplement to it – For stabilizing and unifying the Quraysh.

The term 'ilaf' is an infinitive which means 'uniting together', and the term 'ulfat' means 'a gathering with intimacy and union'. The purpose of using it is for the familiarity and union amongst the Quraysh who, together with all the citizens of Mecca, had settled there was due to the honour, importance and security of the holy Ka'bah. If the army of Abrahah were successful in destroying the Ka'bah, no other people would become familiar with the region.

The next verse reads: (We maintain for them) their trading caravans by winter and summer.

The purpose of the unifying the Quraysh may have been due to their love for their sacred land. The political and economical importance of the holy Ka'bah kept them secure from the invasions of the hostile tribes and helped them monopolize the trade of the area owing to the annual *Hajj* pilgrimages.

In the summer, they used to go to Syria which had moderate weather and in winter to Yemen where they enjoyed a warm climate, for the purposes of trade, and it was by Allah's grace that they travelled safe and undisturbed on their journeys, otherwise, the routes were not safe and none could travel without being plundered and suffering death and destruction or suffering heavy losses. This was a manifest blessing upon them.

But, the same tribe, the Quraysh, whose protection, safety and honour was due to the Holy Ka'bah being in their city and they being its guardians, later became the prime enemies of Islam.

The next verse states, So let them worship the Lord of this House (Ka'bah) and the chapter ends by the statement, Who fed them against hunger and secured them from fear.

When the Quraysh had been granted such great blessings of security, trade and honour, they should

have gratefully worshipped the Lord of the Ka'bah, who, in spite of their land being only a desert and thus unproductive, provided them with every kind of good and provision.

This was an open admonition to the Quraysh who, at the start of the ministry of the Prophet (S), had been the most persistent of enemies. It was also a warning that Allah, the One who protected them from Abrahah, could just as easily destroy them or turn their state to hunger and fear.

The Great Event Of Mubahila

Two years after Prophet Muhammad (S) first made official contact with the Yemeni tribes, a momentous event known as Mubahila5 took place in the 10th Year of hijrah. So important was it to the history of Islam that Allah eternalised it in the Qur'an in Surah Al 'Imran, verses 55 to 64. For the sake of brevity, only those verses specific to Yemen will be mentioned, elaborating on the event itself.

The likeness of Jesus, with Allah, is as the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust then He said to him' BE! 'And he 'was'. (Surah 'Ali-Imran, 3:59).

A group of Christian's entered Medina and went to meet the Prophet (S). They stated that the birth of Jesus, without having a father, was a sign of, and an evidence for his divinity.

Then the verse was revealed and answered them such that if the fatherless creation is the evidence for Christ's divinity or being the 'Son' of Allah, the creation of Adam is something more important than that because Adam had neither father nor mother. So, why then do you not consider Adam the Lord or Son of the Lord or greater than Jesus?

(This about Jesus is) the truth from your Lord, therefore be not you of the doubters. (Surah 'Ali-Imran, 3:60).

The Arabic term *mumtarin* is derived from *miryah* which means 'doubt' or 'suspicion'. It is an expression similar to the words in Surah al–Baqarah (2) verse 147, which also speaks about people of the scriptures knowing the truth about the Prophet Muhammad (S), but allowing their whims to cause doubt in their true knowledge.

And whoever dispute with you concerning him, after what has come to you of knowledge, say: 'Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, and our selves and your selves, then let us invoke in earnest and lay the curse of Allah upon the liars. (Surah 'Ali-Imran, 3:61).

The verse, owing to its containing the term *nabtahel* has come to be known in Islamic literature as the verse of *mubahilah* translated as 'imprecation' or 'mutual curse'. The Arabic term *mubahilah* means to leave the personal tendencies and invoke God's curse onto the one who is not truthful.

In the tenth year, some Muslims were commissioned to go to Najran, a region in Yemen, to preach Islam. The Christian inhabitants of Najran set out a religious mission from their side to attend Medina and discuss with the Prophet (S).

After some debates and disputes between them and the Prophet (S), they felt hesitation and sought for pretexts. Then, this verse was revealed inviting them to a malediction to see which of the two parties were truthful and which would be cursed by God. They asked the Prophet of Islam (S) for respite to contemplate and consult over the subject, eventually agreeing.

On the day set for the imprecation, they saw that the Prophet (S) approached the appointed spot followed by two boys, a young man and a lady. Those two boys were Imams Hasan and Husayn, the Prophet's grandchildren, the young man was Imam Ali, and the lady was Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter.

When the Chief Monk saw them, he exclaimed: "By God! I see the faces that, if they pray to God for mountains to move from their places, the mountains will immediately move." He then stated: "If they curse you, you will be wiped out of existence to the last day of the life of the earth."

The Christians asked Muhammad (S) to give up the idea of the agreed *mubahilah* and they announced they were ready for compromise. They offered to pay two thousand suits – each of which cost, more or less, at forty dirhams every year. At this place, there has been built a mosque by the name of Masjid alliabah which is about two kilometers from the tomb of the Prophet (S) in Masjid al-Nabi.

The event denotes a great victory for Islam and acted as an evidence of the religion and those who were selected to represent the religion by the Prophet Muhammad (S).

- 1. An Enlightening Commentary of the Qur'an, vol. 15, section 2 at:
- https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-15... [1] (Last accessed on May 15, 2018).
- 2. An Enlightening Commentary of the Qur'an at
- https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-20... [2] (Last accessed on May 15, 2018).
- 3. An Enlightening Commentary of the Qur'an at
- https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-20... [3] (Last accessed on February 2, 2018).
- 4. An Enlightening Commentary of the Qur'an at
- https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-20... [4]
- 5. An Enlightening Commentary of the Qur'an at

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https://www.al-islam.org/baldatun-tayyibatun-land-most-goodly-jaffer-ali-ladak/chapter-1-ancient-yemen-quran

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[1]

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[2]

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[3] https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-20/Surah-fil-chapter-105 [4]

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[5]

https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-3/section-4-christians-were-invited-spiritual-contest