

Section 4: Moses Rescues the Children of Israel

Surah Ash-Shu'ara – Verse 52–53

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنِ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْكَافِرِينَ

فَأَرْسَلَ فِرْعَوْنُ فِي الْمَدَائِنِ حَاشِرِينَ

52. “And We revealed unto Moses (saying): ‘Go you forth with My servants by night, for verily you will be pursued’.”

53. “Then Pharaoh sent heralds into the cities.”

Since the Children of Israel had provided Pharaoh some benefits, he barred them from migration and Moses (as) was ordered to move them from Egypt at night.

In the previous holy verses we saw that Moses (as) was the victorious party in that day. Although Pharaoh and his supporters did not believe in him, this happening had some important consequences each of which were an important victory:

1. The Children of Israel achieved faith in their leader and they supported him by soul and body, for after years of misery, wretchedness and wandering they saw a divine prophet who both guaranteed their guidance and led their revolution, victory and freedom.
2. Moses (as) had gained a foothold among Egyptians and Coptic ones. Some had been under his influence, or, at least, they feared opposing him, and the sound of his call ringed out throughout Egypt.
3. More importantly from the view of both public opinion and fearing life exposing to danger, Pharaoh did

not dare oppose a man who had such a staff and a very expressive language.

All of these affairs provided a proper ground for Moses (as) to remain among those people and to do propagation, call them after providing them proofs.

In this way many years passed, and Moses (as) presented them some other miracles, which were mentioned in the commentaries of verses 13–135 of Surah Al-'A'raf, No. 7 along with logic and discussion. Even Allah imposed drought and famine on Egyptians for some years in order to make awake those who deserved to be awoken.

When Moses (as) provided them proof and reason and believers and disbelievers were distinguished, the Children of Israel were commanded to migrate. The concerned verses depict the scene first.

The Qur'an says:

“And We revealed unto Moses (saying): ‘Go you forth with My servants by night, for verily you will be pursued’.”

This was the divine plan for them to move at night then the people of Pharaoh could become aware of this plan, and So to pursue the Children of Israel.

In spite of the fact that the Qur'anic phrase *lauhaynal (we revealed) has come before the word /'ibadi/ (My servants)*, which is in plural form, this word, /'ibadi/ is for showing the ultimate kindness of Allah towards His faithful servants.

Moses (as) obeyed this commandment and mobilized the Children of Israel by night in secret and issued the command of migration. He especially chose night, as Allah had ordered, to make his plan more exact and calculated.

It is clear that the movement of such a huge group of people could not be kept hidden for a long time. Pharaoh's spies did inform him very soon.

The holy Qur'an says:

“Then Pharaoh sent heralds into the cities.”

Of course, in the conditions of that time delivering the message to all cities of Egypt needed considerable time, but it is natural that this message reached to near cities very fast, and the ready forces moved immediately and they formed a small army. Other forces also joined them gradually.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara – Verses 54–56

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءَ لَشِرْذِمَةٌ قَلِيلُونَ

وَأَنَّهُمْ لَنَا لَغَائِظُونَ

وَإِنَّا لَجَمِيعٌ حَازِرُونَ

54. “Verily these (Israelites) are only a small group,”

55. “And verily they have enraged us.”

56. “And verily we are a host on our guard.”

The Qur’anic word */šir immah/* means a limited group which is separated from the main.¹ Pharaoh propagated that his opponents were a small group. But in some commentaries we read that it is narrated from Ibn ‘Abbas that those who were with Moses (as) were about 600000 and Pharaoh called these many people as ‘a little troop’.

He said:

“Verily these (Israelites) are only a small group,”

To make people psychologically ready for this general mobilization, Pharaoh ordered his own men to declare this announcement that his opponents were a small group. (He meant they are quantitatively less than Pharaoh's men and less powerful than them.)

So they said to themselves that, with their strong power, there was no problem and nothing to fear of and they could certainly be victorious.

In the next verse, they implicitly said that how much they could be patient, and in what extent they might conciliate with those rebellious slaves.

It says:

“And verily they have enraged us.”

Pharaoh’s men could not tolerate them (slaves) anymore, yet they said: Who would irrigate farms of Egypt the following days? Who would mend the houses of Pharaoh’s men? Who would carry heavy things in this vast country? Who would be servant of the men of Pharaoh?

In the next verse it says:

“And verily we are a host on our guard.”

They mean that they were ready to fight Moses’ (as) people anytime and anywhere, for they feared the conspiracy of this group.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 57-60

فَأَخْرَجْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ

وَكُنُوزٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ

كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

فَاتَّبَعُوهُمْ مُّشْرِقِينَ

57. “So We expelled them from the gardens and the springs,”

58. “And treasures and a goodly dwelling,”

59. “Thus (did We drown them) and We made the Children of Israel the inheritors to them.”

60. “Then they (Pharaoh’s host) pursued them at sunrise.”

One of Allah’s ways of treatment is to replace oppressors with the oppressed. Departure of Pharaoh and his men after the Children of Israel was a divine prudence to sink them. Consequently wealth, palaces and gardens of Pharaoh and his people turn into the possession of the Children of Israel.

In these noble verses, the destiny of Pharaohs is mentioned and the holy Qur’an concisely states the declination of Pharaoh and ruling of the Children of Israel.

It says:

“So We expelled them from the gardens and the springs,”

“And treasures and a goodly dwelling,”

Yes, thus were those things taken from them and Allah caused the Children of Israel to inherit them.

The verse says:

“Thus (did We drown them) and We made the Children of Israel the inheritors to them.”

Commentators have various opinions about the Qur’anic phrase */maqamin karim/ (a goodly dwelling)*. Some say that it means luxurious palaces and expensive houses. Some say that it means gatherings and meetings of the rulers which were encircled with some obedient officers.

Of course these two commentaries are consistent. It is likely that both of them are include in the concept of the verse; both their palaces and their power and positions were taken from them.

According to the above verse,

“Thus (did We drown them) and We made the Children of Israel the inheritors to them”,

some commentators believe that the Children of Israel came back to Egypt and ruled the country for some time.²

Of course the verses are apparently in line with this commentary, while some believe that after sinking of Pharaoh and his men they went to the holy lands, but, after a length of time, they returned to Egypt and established a government.³

The concerning Chapters of the current Torah are in line with this commentary.

Some say that probably the Children of Israel were divided into two groups. A group remained in Egypt and ruled, and a group went with Moses (as) to the holy lands.

However, as the last verse implies, Pharaoh sent his men to the cities of Egypt and gathered enough army and forces.

Some commentators say that he sent 600000 men as an advanced guard and he himself followed them with 1000000 soldiers. They moved fast at night and pursued them and they reached Moses (as) and his people when sun was rising, as the holy Qur’an says:

“Then they (Pharaoh’s host) pursued them at sunrise.”

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 61-62

فَلَمَّا تَرَاءَى الْجَمْعَانِ قَالَ أَصْحَابُ مُوسَى إِنَّا لَمُدْرِكُونَ

قَالَ كَلَّا إِنَّ رَبِّي مَعِيَ سَاهِدِينَ

61. “So when the two parties saw each other, the companions of Moses said: ‘Indeed we are overtaken!’”

62. “(Moses) said: ‘By no means! Verily my Lord is with me, soon will He guide me (to safety)’.”

Heavenly leaders are calm and serene at the time of crises and cause others to be calm. Confronting foe (even when one is trapped between sea and foe), one must not get disappointed and must trust Allah and believe in divine promises.

However, to illustrate their situation, the Qur’an says:

“So when the two parties saw each other, the companions of Moses said: ‘Indeed we are overtaken!’”

There was a wavy sea in front of them and there was a strong and tyrannical arm behind them. A very equipped troop who were angry with the Children of Israel and they had showed that they were blood thirsty with killing their issues during many years, and Pharaoh himself was also a stubborn and bloodthirsty tyrant.

Therefore, they would possibly surround them and would torture or arrest and kill them. And situations wholly showed that this was so.

At that time the Children of Israel suffered some painful moments, the bitter moments whose bitterness cannot be described. Perhaps some of them lost heart and their faith was shaken.

But, as the verse implies, Moses (as) was still calm and faithful and knew that Allah’s promises about deliverance of the Children of Israel and the destruction of tyrannical people are not to be unfulfilled.

Therefore, believing and trusting in Allah, Moses (as) addressed the frightened Children of Israel and implicitly said that it was not so, and the foe could never overcome them because his Lord was with him and He would guide him.

The verse says:

“(Moses) said: ‘By no means! Verily my Lord is with me, soon will He guide me (to safety)’.”

This may refer to the same promise that Allah gave to Moses (as) and Aaron at the time of specifying their mission:

“He said: ‘Fear not. Verily I am with you both, hearing and seeing.’”⁴

Thus, whether all of the Children of Israel returned to, Egypt and established a government, or some of

them, obeying Moses' command, remained there and carried out this plan, otherwise, sending Pharaoh and his men out and making the Children of Israel inherit them, which is mentioned in the verses, has not a clear concept.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara – Verses 63-64

فَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْبَحْرَ فَانْفَلَقَ فَكَانَ كُلُّ فِرْقٍ كَالطَّوْدِ الْعَظِيمِ

وَأَزَلَفْنَا ثَمَّ الْآخِرِينَ

63. “Then We revealed to Moses: ‘Strike the sea with your staff’, then it clove asunder and each part became like a huge mountain.”

64. “Then We made the other party approach thither.”

It is always with Allah's will and divine revelations that all prophets do their jobs.

Allah does some jobs through His friends in order to make people pay attention to them and obey them. (Yes, the nature and its manifestations are fully, by Allah's will, at the mercy of His special servants and are over powered by them.)

It was why that the Qur'an says:

“Then We revealed to Moses: ‘Strike the sea with your Staff’...”

The same staff that is the means of miracles and warning on one day, it is the sign of mercy and deliverance on the other day. Moses (as) did this and hit his staff against the sea and a very strange scene happened in a manner that the Children of Israel got very happy.

Suddenly the sea divided, its water separated into pieces, and each piece, like a huge mountain, was over another piece; and among them a road appeared.

The verse continues saying:

“...then it clove asunder and each part became like a huge mountain.”

The Arabic word /infalaqa/ is derived from the word /falq/ which means to get broken up. The word /firq/ is derived from the word /farq/ which means to separate, hi other words, (as Raqib says in Mufradat), the

difference between /falq/ and /firq/ is that the first one refers to breaking and the second one refers to separating.

Thus, the Arabic words /firqih/ and /firq/ are applied to a piece or group that is separated from the rest.

The Arabic word /taud/ means a huge mountain and using an adjective in this verse which means 'huge' for it, is for the sake of emphasis.

Anyway, Allah, Who rules everything and if waters get wavy it is because of His command, if storms take place, it is by His order, and Who has created the universe, and water, wind, and soil are under His authority, commanded waves of the sea to pile. And then roads appeared between them and every group of the Children of Israel chose one of them to pass.

Pharaoh and his men got astonished by seeing this scene and such a clear miracle, but they did not stop being conceited and still pursued Moses (as) and the Children of Israel and sought their final destiny, as the holy Qur'an says:

“Then We made the other party approach thither.”

Therefore, unaware of the fact that they were going to die and the divine command of punishment would be soon issued, Pharaoh and his ignorant men entered the marine roads and ran arrogantly after their former slaves who had disobeyed them.

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 65-66

وَأَنْجَيْنَا مُوسَى وَمَنْ مَّعَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ

65. “And We saved Moses and those with him all together.”

66. “Then We drowned the others.”

Deliverance and salvation can be gained only by following the Divine Prophets.

In the worst conditions, Allah saves His friends from dead locks.

The sea being cloven asunder and the Pharaohs being drowned are the signs of the power and the wrath of Allah which must be the cause of admonition. Also, Allah's way of treatment has been to assist

‘the truth’ and to destroy ‘the wrong’ throughout the history!

So, in this holy verse, the noble Qur’an says:

“And We saved Moses and those with him all together.”

Just when the last member of the Children of Israel came out of the sea and the last member of the host of Pharaoh entered the sea, Allah ordered the water of the sea to return to the first state. The huge raging waves fell down and came together and took Pharaoh and his host, like some straw, with them here and there and destroyed them.

The Qur’an has stated this event in a short sentence when it says:

“Then We drowned the others.”

Thus, in a very short moment, everything finished. Those captivated slaves easily became free; those proud tyrants were punished and annihilated; the history changed and the glorious palaces, which had been founded over the ruined houses of the oppressed, vanished; the period of those arrogant people ended and then the oppressed people inherited their land and their government.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 67-68

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

67. “Verily in this is a sign, yet most of them do not believe.”

68. “And verily your Lord, certainly He is the Mighty, the Merciful.”

By explaining the history of some of the former nations, Allah soothes the holy Prophet of Islam (S) and teaches him patience.

Yes, it is true that the Qur’an says:

“Verily in this is a sign, yet most of them do not believe.”

It seems that their eyes are close, their ears are deaf, and their hearts are asleep.

Where the people of Pharaoh, with those wonderful scenes and events, did not believe, the Prophet (S)

should not surprise of this infidel people and he would not be worried of their disbelief because the history has contained many of them in it.

The application of the Arabic word /'akar/, mentioned in this noble verse, refers to this sense that some of the people of Pharaoh embraced the religion of Moses and joined his companions.

Not only 'Asiyah, Pharaoh's wife, and Moses' faithful friend who is mentioned in the Qur'an as 'the believer of the people of Pharaoh', but also some others, such as the wizards, repented and joined Moses (as).

In the next verse, through a short and expressive sentence, the Qur'an refers to the unlimited power and mercy of Allah, where it says:

“And verily your Lord, certainly He is the Mighty, the Merciful.”

It is because of His 'Might' that whenever He wills He issues the command of the destruction of a rebellious nation, and for destroying a tyrannical group He does not need to send down the army of the angels from heaven, He may order the water, which is the cause of their life, to put them to death, and that very Nile River, which was the source of wealth and power for the people of Pharaoh, becomes the place of their dead bodies.

And, it is from His Mercy that He does not haste in issuing this command, but He respites them for years, sends miracles for them, and completes the argument, and it is also from His Mercy that He makes these oppressed slaves free from the grips of those cruel rulers.

This point is noteworthy that it is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an that by the command of Allah Moses (as) made the Children of Israel pass the sea, /bahr/5, and in a few occurrences the word /yam/ has been used for it.6

Now, what is the objective of the words /bahr/ and /yam/ used here? Do they refer to the vast and great river of Nile from which the whole freshness and liveliness of Egypt originate? Or they refer to the Red Sea.

There are some evidences which show the purpose is the great river of Nile, because the word /bahr/ in Arabic, as Raqib in Mufradat says, originally means 'vast and abundant water', and the word /yam/ means the same. Therefore applying these two words for Nile does not matter.

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1. The commentaries of Majma'-ul-Bayan and Fakhri-Razi
 2. Majma'-ul-Bayan and Qurtabi, the explanations following the verses
 3. Ruh-ul-Ma'ani, by 'Alusi, the explanations following the verses
 4. Surah Ta-Ha, No. 20, verse 46
 5. Suras Yunus, verse 9; Ta Ha, verse 77, Shu'ara, verse 69, Dukhan, verse 24

6. Suras Ta Ha, verse 78, Qasas, verse 40, and Thariyat, verse

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