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Section 4: The Israelites breaking the Covenant

People of Moses commanded to march into the Holy Land – the people's refusal to act – the punishment

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 20

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَعَلَ فِيكُمْ أَنْبِيَاءَ
وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مُلُوكًا وَأَتَاكُمْ مَا لَمْ يُؤْتِ أَحَدًا مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

20. "And (remember) when Moses said to his people: 'O' my people! remember the favour of Allah upon you when He raised prophets among you and made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to anyone else in the world. "

The remembrance of divine bounties is the motive of love, gratitude, and worship. Now, the greatest bounties given by *Allah* (s.w.t.) are: the bounty of prophecy, the bounty of government and power, and the bounty of freedom.

For the invitation of people, the factor of emotion in populations should be utilized. That is why we ought to make them prepared through reminding them the favours of *Allah* (s.w.t.) before inviting them to action and assistance.

One of the responsibilities of prophets (as) is reminding people of *Allah's* favours.¹

"...remember the favour of Allah ..."

However, we must take an example from the history of the past.

After enjoying the peculiar favour of *Allah* and reaching authority, the people of Moses inflicted with humiliation and wretchedness because of opposing the command of *Allah*.

The verse is recited as follows:

"And (remember) when Moses said to his people: 'O' my people! remember the favour of Allah upon you when He raised prophets among you and made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to anyone else in the world."

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 21

يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَرْتَدُّوا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِكُمْ
فَتَنقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ

21. "O' my people! enter the holy land which Allah has ordained for you and do not turn your backs, for then you will return (Us) losers."

In this verse, the Qur'an states the process of the arrival of the Children of Israel into the holy land as follows:

Moses (as) told his people to arrive the holy land which *Allah* (s.w.t.) had assigned for them, and as for that arrival, they should not be afraid of its difficulties. They were enjoined not to refrain from any self – sacrifice, because had they turned on their backs, they would have been of the losers. The Qur'an from the tongue of Moses says:

"O' my people! enter the holy land which Allah has ordained for you and do not turn your backs, for then you will return (Us) losers."

The objective meaning of the Qur'anic phrase /'ard-al-muqaddas/ (the holy land) is either the whole region of ancient Shamat (Syria, Jordan, Palestine, etc.), or Jerusalem.

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 22

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّ فِيهَا قَوْمًا جَبَّارِينَ وَإِنَّا لَنَدْخُلُهَا حَتَّىٰ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِن يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِنَّا دَاخِلُونَ

22. "They (Israelites) said: 'O' Moses! verily there is a very arrogant race in it, and verily, we will never enter it until they get out from it. So if they get out from it, then certainly, we will enter."

The Arabic term /jabbar/ is derived from /jabr/ with the meaning of 'improving something accompanied

with force and pressure'. Yet, the term has been applied with both of these meanings: 1) to compensate, 2) power, might, overcome. The Qur'anic word /jabbar/ has been used as a title or an appellation for *Allah* (s.w.t.) with both of the above two meanings.

The phrase /qaum-an-jabbarin/ (a very arrogant race), mentioned in the above verse, refers to the people of the very tribe of 'Amaliqah from the Semitic race who were living in Sinaie desert located in the north of old Arabia. They ('Amaliqah tribe) invaded Egypt and ruled there for five hundred years. 2

However, the existence of some corrupted people somewhere cannot be a reason for eligible persons that they retire. Enemy should be sent out. We ought not to wait until the enemy himself goes out.

"They (Israelites) said: 'O' Moses! verily there is a very arrogant race in it, and verily, we will never enter it until they get out from it. So if they get out from it, then certainly, we will enter."

Mere pleasure-seeking is prohibited in Islam. We must act and ask *Allah* to help us to send out the enemy.

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 23

قَالَ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أُنْعِمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمَا ادْخُلُوا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبَابَ فَإِذَا
دَخَلْتُمُوهُ فَإِنَّكُمْ غَالِبُونَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

23. "Two men of those that feared (Allah) whom Allah had blessed, said: 'Enter against them by the gate! for when you have entered it, you will certainly be victorious. So, upon Allah should you rely if you are believers."

As the Qur'anic commentary books indicate, those two men, who are mentioned in the verse, were from among those twelve chiefs of the Israelites. They were called Yusha'-ibn-Nun (Joshua, the son of Nun), and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, whose names are mentioned in the Torah, Numbers.3 The verse says:

"Two men of those that feared (Allah) whom Allah had blessed, said: 'Enter against them by the gate! for when you have entered it, you will certainly be victorious. ..."

By the way, fearing God is a cause for absorbing the favours of *Allah* (s.w.t.) and His bounties. So, the one who is in awe of *Allah* (s.w.t.), does not fear any other might, and therefore, he must rely only on *Allah*.

"... So, upon Allah should you rely if you are believers."

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 24

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى إِنَّا لَن نَدْخُلُهَا أَبَدًا مَا دَامُوا فِيهَا فَازْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا إِنَّا هَاهُنَا قَاعِدُونَ

24. "They said: 'O' Moses! we shall never enter it at all, so long as they (the arrogant) are in it. Go, therefore, you and your Lord, and fight you both! Verily we will stay here sitting."

Mecca and Jerusalem are both holy lands. When Moses (as) told his people to enter it and struggle against enemy, they made a pretext and offended against his command.

But, in the sixth year A.H., when the Muslims, accompanied with the holy Prophet (S), went toward Mecca in order to perform the rites of Umrah (lesser Pilgrimage), they would invade the city vigorously if there were not the hindrance of the Messenger of *Allah* (S).

It was in this journey that the agreement of 'Hudaybiyyah peace' was made. Yes, both those two peoples reached to the gates of two sacred cities while one of them were so coward that refused the command of their prophet, and the others were so brave that were eager to participate in the holy struggle.

"They said: 'O' Moses! we shall never enter it at all, so long as they (the arrogant) are in it. Go, therefore, you and your Lord, and fight you both! Verily we will stay here sitting."

The Children of Israel have been the example of the groups who are known for their impoliteness, seeking for excuses, feebleness, and loving comfort.

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 25

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لَا أَمْلِكُ إِلَّا نَفْسِي وَأَخِي فَافْرِقْ بَيْنَنَا وَقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

25. " He (Moses) said: ' O' my Lord! I have power over none but myself and my brother, therefore make a separation between us and these rebellious people."

This verse denotes that Moses (as) became completely disappointed from that crowd of people. He (as) supplicated and asked *Allah* his separation from them, so that they would see the fruit of their deeds and try to improve themselves. He said:

"... ' O' my Lord! I have power over none but myself and my brother, therefore make a separation

between us and these rebellious people."

Of course, the action that the Children of Israel did was almost a kind of disbelief. They manifestly rejected the command of their prophet. If we recite that the Qur'an has qualified them as 'rebellious people', it is because the Arabic word /fasiq/ has a vast scope of meaning which envelops any departure from the institution of worship and servitude.

Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 26

قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ
الْفَاسِقِينَ

26. "He (The Lord) said: 'So it (the Holy Land) will surely be forbidden to them for forty years that they will wander about in the earth, therefore do not grieve for the rebellious people.'"

The Arabic term /yatihun/ is derived from the word /tayaha/ with the sense of 'wander'. But, in the lapse of time, the word /tiyah/ was applied for the plain of Sinai. It has also been called to the place where that group of people (the Israelites) lived for forty years without having the material and spiritual merits of the ground.

"He (The Lord) said: ' So it (the Holy Land) will surely be forbidden to them for forty years that they will wander about in the earth therefore do not grieve for the rebellious people.'"

The story of the disobedience of the Children of Israel and the Divine Wrath, and their wandering state in Tiyah is mentioned in the Old Testament, Numbers, Chapter four.

According to a tradition stated by Imam Baqir (as), after wandering for forty years and losing Moses and Aaron (as), the Israelites entered the zone by a martial attack, and their seeking comfort had no result for them but retardation and wandering.

Imam Baqir (as) has said that there will occur a similar situation for Muslims, like what happened for the Children of Israel.

Explanations

1. The recompense of showing shortcoming and despicableness, and also that of disobedience from the commandment of *Alah*, and escaping from the Holy Struggle, is such deprivations and vagrancies.
2. Wandering-state is a kind of punishment for the evildoers, while having the merit of light and discrimination is a kind of present for the righteous ones.

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1. Some of the specific bounties given to the Children of Israel are: crossing the Nile, the movement of Tur Mount, Manna and Salwa coming down from heaven, the water of twelve springs, and so on.
 2. Encyclopaedia, by Farid Wajdi
 3. The Old Testament, Numbers, Chapter 14, No 6 and 9.
 6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes.
 7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying the land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.
 8. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.
 9. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defence departed from them and the LORD is with us; fear them not.

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