

DAY 2

ANSWER: Babylon

SŪRAH AL-BAQARAH: VERSES 102-103

And they followed what the devils used to recite in the reign of Sulayman (Solomon) -- it was not Sulaymān who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels, teaching people magic, and what had been sent down to the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, in Babylon. And these two did not teach anyone without having said, 'We are nothing but a trial, so do not go infidel.' Then, they used to learn from them that with which they could separate man from his wife. But they were not to bring harm through it to anyone, without the will of Allah. And they used to learn what harmed them and did no good to them. And they certainly knew that he who buys it has no share in the Hereafter. And, indeed, vile is the thing for which they sold themselves away. Only if they knew! And had they accepted the faith, and been God-fearing, the reward from Allah would have always been far better. Only if they knew!

COMMENTARY – TAFSĪR IBN KATHĪR

Magic existed before Sulaymān (Solomon)

As-Suddi said that Allah's statement, **(They followed what the Shayatin (devils) gave out (falsely of the magic) in the lifetime of Sulayman)** means, *"During the time of Prophet Solomon."* Beforehand, the devils used to ascend to heaven and eavesdrop on the conversations of the angels about what will occur on the earth regarding death, other incidents or unseen matters. They would convey this news to the soothsayers, and the soothsayers would in turn convey the news to the people. The people would believe what the soothsayers told them as being true. When the soothsayers trusted the devils, the devils started to lie to them and added other words to the true news that they heard, to the extent of adding seventy false words to each true word. The people recorded these words in some books. Soon after, the Children of Israel said that the Jinns know matters of the Unseen. When Solomon was sent as a Prophet, he collected these books in a box and buried it under his throne; any devil that dared get near the box was burned. Solomon said, *'I will not hear of anyone who says that the devils know the Unseen, but I will cut off his head.'* When Solomon died and the scholars who knew the truth about Solomon perished, there came another generation. To them, the devil materialized in the shape of a human and said to some of the Children of Israel, *'Should I lead you to a treasure that you will never be able to use up'* They said, *'Yes.'* He said, *'Dig under this throne,'* and he went with them and showed them Solomon's throne. They said to him, *'Come closer.'* He said, *'No. I will wait for you here, and if you do not find the treasure then kill me.'* They dug and found the buried books, and Satan said to them, *'Solomon only controlled the humans, devils and birds with this magic.'* Thereafter, the news that Solomon was a sorcerer spread among the people, and the Children of Israel adopted these books. When Muhammad ﷺ came, they disputed with

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him relying on these books. Hence Allah's statement, **(Sulayman did not disbelieve, but the Shayatīn (devils) disbelieved).**

The Story of Hārūt and Mārūt, and the Explanation that They were Angels

Allah said, **(And such things that came down at Babylon to the two angels, Harut and Marut, but neither of these two (angels) taught anyone (such things) till they had said, "We are for trial, so disbelieve not (by learning this magic from us)." And from these (angels) people learn that by which they cause separation between man and his wife).**

There is a difference of opinion regarding this story. It was said that this Ayah denies that anything was sent down to the two angels, as Al-Qurṭubī stated and then referred to the Ayah, **(Sulayman did not disbelieve)** saying, *"The negation applies in both cases. Allah then said, **(But the Shayatin (devils) disbelieved, teaching men magic and such things that came down at Babylon to the two angels).** The Jews claimed that Gabriel and Michael brought magic down to the two angels, but Allah refuted this false claim."*

Also, Ibn Jarīr reported, that Al-`Awfi said that Ibn `Abbās said about Allah's statement, **(And such things that came down at Babylon to the two angels)** *"Allah did not send magic down."*

Also, Ibn Jarīr narrated that Ar-Rabī` bin Anas said about, **(And such things that came down to the two angels)**, *"Allah did not send magic down to them."* Ibn Jarīr commented, *"This is the correct explanation for this Ayah. **(They followed what the Shayatin (devils) gave out (falsely) in the lifetime of Sulayman.)** meaning, magic. However, neither did Solomon disbelieve nor did Allah send magic with the two angels. The devils, on the other hand, disbelieved and taught magic to the people of the Babylon of Hārūt and Mārūt."*

Ibn Jarīr continued; *"If someone asks about explaining this Ayah in this manner, we say that, **(They followed what the Shayatin (devils) gave out (falsely) in the lifetime of Sulayman.)** means, magic. Solomon neither disbelieved nor did Allah send magic with the two angels. However, the devils disbelieved and taught magic to the people in the Babylon of Hārūt and Mārūt, meaning Gabriel and Michael, for Jewish sorcerers claimed that Allah sent magic by the words of Gabriel and Michael to Solomon, son of David. Allah denied this false claim and stated to His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that Gabriel and Michael were not sent with magic. Allah also exonerated Solomon from practicing magic, which the devils taught to the people of Babylon by the hands of two men, Hārūt and Mārūt. Hence, Hārūt and Mārūt were two ordinary men (not angels or Gabriel or Michael)." These were the words of Aṭ-Ṭabarī, and this explanation is not plausible.*

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Many among the Salaf, said that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels who came down from heaven to earth and did what they did as the Ayah stated. To conform this opinion with the fact that the angels are immune from error, we say that Allah had eternal knowledge what these angels would do, just as He had eternal knowledge that Iblis would do as he did, while Allah referred to him being among the angels, **(And (remember) when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." And they prostrated except Iblis (Satan), he refused) (20:116)** and so forth. However, what Hārūt and Mārūt did was less evil than what Iblis, may Allah curse him, did. Al-Qurṭubī reported this opinion from `Alī, Ibn Mas`ūd, Ibn `Abbās, Ibn `Umar, Ka`b Al-Ahbar, As-Suddi and Al-Kalbī.

Learning Magic is Kufr

Allah said, **(But neither of these two (angels) taught anyone (such things) till they had said, "We are for trial, so disbelieve not (by learning this magic from us).")**

Abū Ja`far Ar-Rāzī said that Ar-Rābi' bin Anas said that Qays bin `Abbad said that Ibn `Abbās said, *"When someone came to the angels to learn magic, they would discourage him and say to him, 'We are only a test, so do not fall into disbelief.' They had knowledge of what is good and evil and what constitutes belief or disbelief, and they thus knew that magic is a form of disbelief. When the person who came to learn magic still insisted on learning it, they commanded him to go to such and such place, where if he went, Satan would meet him and teach him magic. When this man would learn magic, the light (of faith) would depart him, and he would see it shining (and flying away) in the sky. He would then proclaim, 'O my sorrow! Woe unto me! What should I do.' Al-Ḥaṣan Al-Baṣrī said that this Ayah means, 'The angels were sent with magic, so that the people whom Allah willed would be tried and tested. Allah made them promise that they would not teach anyone until first proclaiming, 'We are a test for you, do not fall into disbelief.'"* It was recorded by Ibn Abi Hatim. Also, Qatādah said, *"Allah took their covenant to not teach anyone magic until they said, 'We are a test. Therefore, do not fall in disbelief.'"*

Also, As-Suddī said, *"When a man would come to the two angels they would advise him, 'Do not fall into disbelief. We are a test. When the man would ignore their advice, they would say, 'Go to that pile of ashes and urinate on it.' When he would urinate on the ashes, a light, meaning the light of faith, would depart from him and would shine until it entered heaven. Then something black that appeared to be smoke would descend and enter his ears and the rest of his body, and this is Allah's anger. When he told the angels what happened, they would teach him magic. So Allah's statement, (But neither of these two (angels) taught anyone (such things) till they had said, "We are for trial, so disbelieve not (by learning this magic from us).")*

Sunayd said that Ḥajjāj said that Ibn Jurayj commented on this **Ayah (2:102)**, *"No one dares practice magic except a disbeliever. As for the Fitnah, it involves trials and freedom of choice."* The scholars who

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stated that learning magic is disbelief relied on this Ayah for evidence. They also mentioned the Ḥadīth that Abū Bakr Al-Bazzār recorded from `Abdullah, which states, (*Whoever came to a soothsayer or a sorcerer and believed in what he said, will have disbelieved in what Allah revealed to Muhammad.*). This Ḥadīth has an authentic chain of narration and there are other Ḥadīths which support it.

Causing a Separation between the Spouses is One of the Effects of Magic

Allah said, (**And from these (angels) people learn that by which they cause separation between man and his wife,**) This means, "*The people learned magic from Hārūt and Mārūt and indulged in evil acts that included separating spouses, even though spouses are close to, and intimately associate with each other. This is the devil's work.*"

Muslim recorded that Jābir bin `Abdullah said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, (*Satan erects his throne on water and sends his emissaries among the people. The closest person to him is the person who causes the most Fitnah. One of them (a devil) would come to him and would say, 'I kept inciting so-and-so, until he said such and such words.' Iblis says, 'No, by Allah, you have not done much.' Another devil would come to him and would say, 'I kept inciting so-and-so, until I separated between him and his wife.' Satan would draw him closer and embrace him, saying, 'Yes, you did well.'*)

Separation between a man and his wife occurs here because each spouse imagines that the other spouse is ugly or ill-mannered, etc.

Allah's Appointed Term supercedes Everything

Allah said, (**But they could not thus harm anyone except by Allah's leave**). Sufyān Ath-Thawrī commented, "*Except by Allah's appointed term.*" Further, Al-Ḥaṣan Al-Baṣrī said that, (**But they could not thus harm anyone except by Allah's leave**) means, "*Allah allows magicians to adversely affect whomever He wills and saves whomever He wills from them. Sorcerers never bring harm to anyone except by Allah's leave.*"

Allah's statement, (**And they learn that which harms them and profits them not.**) means, it harms their religion and does not have a benefit compared to its harm.

(**And indeed they knew that the buyers of it (magic) would have no (Khalaq) share in the Hereafter.**) meaning, "*The Jews who preferred magic over following the Messenger of Allah knew that those who commit the same error shall have no Khalaq in the Hereafter.*" Ibn `Abbās, Mujāhid and As-Suddī stated that `no Khalaq' means, `no share.'

Allah then said, (**And how bad indeed was that for which they sold their own selves, if they but knew.**

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And if they had believed and guarded themselves from evil and kept their duty to Allah, far better would have been the reward from their Lord, if they but knew!).

Allah stated, **(And how bad)** meaning, what they preferred, magic, instead of faith and following the Messenger, if they but comprehend the advice.

(And if they had believed and guarded themselves from evil and kept their duty to Allah, far better would have been the reward from their Lord,) meaning, *"Had they believed in Allah and His Messenger and avoided the prohibitions, then Allah's reward for these good deeds would have been better for them than what they chose and preferred for themselves."*

Similarly, Allah said, **(But those who had been given (religious) knowledge said: "Woe to you! The reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is better for those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and this none shall attain except As-Sabirun (the patient in following the truth).") (28:80).**

COMMENTARY - MA'ĀRIFUL QUR'ĀN

In connection with these two verses, some commentators have reported certain Judaic traditions, which have given rise to a number of doubts, especially in the minds of Muslims with a Western orientation. Maulana Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī rahimahullāh has provided very simple and clear solutions to these exegetical problems, and we shall reproduce them here:-

1. The Jews were impertinent and senseless enough to attribute magic and sorcery to a prophet -- namely, Sayyidnā Sulaymān 'alayhis salām (Solomon). So, in saying that they used to learn the black arts of the devils (*Shayātīn*), the Holy Qur'ān takes care to deny, as a parenthesis, such a vile allegation against Sayyidnā Sulaymān 'alayhis salām.
2. These verses condemn the Jews for indulging in black magic. In connection with the verses, some commentators have reported a long and well-known story about a woman called *Zuhrah*, which is not based on any authentic Islamic tradition. Those scholars who have found the story to be infringing the regulations of the Sharī'ah, have rejected it as mere fiction; but those who believe that it can be interpreted so as to come in line with the Sharī'ah, have not dismissed it totally. For the moment we are not concerned with the question whether the story is true or false. But what we would like to insist upon is the fact that a proper understanding does in no way depend on this story.
3. The Jews knew very well that their indulgence in black magic was not only a sin, but also involved infidelity (*Kufr*). They could also see that such activities would do them no good even in this world, for their sorcery could not harm anyone except when Allah willed it so. Thus their practice went against their knowledge, and they made no use of their understanding to see this discrepancy. That is why the Holy Qur'ān, to begin with, states that they "knew", and then goes on to negate this 'knowledge' by saying, **"Only if they knew!"** For, if one does neither act upon what one knows nor

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tries to understand it properly, one's knowledge is no better than ignorance.

4. There was a time when black magic had grown very popular in the world, particularly in Babylon. Seeing its astonishing efficacy, ignorant people began to confuse its effects with the miracles of prophets, and to suppose that the two were identical in nature. Some even looked upon magicians as being holy men, and worthy of being obeyed; still others actually started learning and practising black magic as if it were a good deed bearing a divine sanction. (Just as there has been a sudden outburst of enthusiasm for the occult sciences in the West since the middle of the sixties in this century, particularly in America where even the universities have been inundated by it)

In short, this extraordinary veneration for magic and magicians had become a potent source of misguidance. In order to eradicate this misunderstanding, Allah sent down to Babylon two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, for informing the people as to the true nature of magic and as to its different forms, so that they should distinguish it from the miracles of prophets, and keep away from obeying magicians and practising magic themselves. Just as the prophethood of prophets is divinely confirmed through miracles, signs and rational or other arguments, in the same way the angelical nature of Hārūt and Mārūt was confirmed on the basis of different signs and arguments, so that people should listen attentively to them and follow their guidance.

This particular function was not assigned to the prophets for two reasons. Firstly, the need of the hour was to establish a distinction between the prophets and the magicians, and, the prophets being in a way a party to the dispute, it was proper that a third party should be the arbitrator. Secondly, the necessary distinction between the two could not, in a normal course, be defined without citing and reporting the verbal formulas employed in magic. Merely to report heretical speech is not in itself a heresy - this is a logical and rational principle, and the Sharī'ah too accepts it. So, the prophets could have been allowed to cite these formulas; but, they being a manifestation of divine guidance, Allah did not ask them to perform such a function, and chose two angels for the purpose. For, Allah's commandments are of two kinds -- those pertaining to *Takwīn* (creation and the cosmic order), and those pertaining to *Tashrī'* (legislation) -, and it is quite possible that sometimes the two may not seem to accord with each other. The order of creation is made up of good and evil both, and it is the angels through whom divine commandments are enforced in this sphere. So, the angels are made to do things which, in the perspective of the cosmic order, always lead to general good, but which, in so far as they necessarily involve some kind of partial disorder, are seen to be evil -- for example, the growth and upkeep of a human tyrant, or of a harmful beast, each of which is right in the context of the order of creation, but wrong from the point of view of the order of legislation. On the other hand, the prophets are entrusted only with the functions of the legislative order, which are, in their general as well as particular applications, nothing but good.

Although, in view of the ultimate purpose, this reporting of the formulas of magic too was related to the

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legislative order, yet there was probability -- which even materialized -- that a reporting of such formulas could give an incentive to the practice of black magic. So, Allah preferred not to make the prophets even an indirect means of such reprehensible activities. All the same, the prophets too were made to serve the main purpose by announcing the basic regulations of the Shari'ah with regard to magic, though not the details pertaining to the minor rules derived from them, for that could have possibly given rise to temptation. We shall explain it through an analogy. The prophets have, for example, told us that it is forbidden to accept a bribe, and have also explained the nature of bribery, but have not given us the details as to how a bribe is given or taken, for a delineation of such minute details would have served only to teach men the different methods of giving or taking a bribe. Or, take an example from different branches of magic. If one utters a certain formula, one would, on getting up from the bed in the morning, find money under his pillow or in his pocket. The Shari'ah makes it quite clear that such a practice is not, in principle, legitimate, but does not specify what that formula is.

In short, the two angels came down to Babylon, and started the work assigned to them -- that is to say, they used to explain the basic principles of magic, its different forms and the specific formulas, and then used to dissuade the people from getting themselves involved in these activities or with the magicians. Their work was exactly like that of a scholar who, finding that illiterate people sometime fall into uttering heretical words or phrases on account of their ignorance, should collect in his speeches or writings all such phrases that have gained currency, and inform them as to what they must carefully avoid.

Now, all sorts of people started coming to the angels for seeking information about the nature and the specific formulas of a magic lest ignorance should lead them into error, in the matter of doctrines or that of deeds. In order to provide the correct teaching on this subject and to protect the people from error, the angels were scrupulous enough to make it a point to warn them of possible dangers in giving them the information. They insisted on making it quite clear that in allowing them to provide this kind of information to the people in general, Allah intended to put His servants through a trial, for He would see who uses this knowledge for protecting his '*Īmān*' (faith) by recognizing evil and avoiding it, and who falls into misguidance by adopting evil that he has come to recognize as evil -- a choice which can easily lead one into *Kufr* (infidelity) in the matter of deeds or in that of doctrines. The angels repeatedly advised them to seek this dangerous information only with a good intent and to remain steadfast in this good intent, and not to misuse the knowledge so as to earn perpetual damnation.

The angels could not be more honest and forthright. So, they explained the basic principles of magic and even the subsidiary details to all those who were ready to take the pledge to remain steadfast in their faith. Of course, if anyone broke the pledge and fell into transgression or infidelity, it was his own business, and the angels could not be held responsible for it. Some were true to their promise, while many did not fulfil the pledge, and made their knowledge of magic a means of doing harm to people -- this in itself is sin and transgression, while some modes of magic actually involve infidelity (*Kufr*). Thus, through a misuse of

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their knowledge of magic, some turned into sinners and others into infidels.

Let us repeat that the angels had taught magic for the purpose of reforming the people and helping them to keep to the straight path, but those who misused this teaching did so out of their own perversity. An example would make the situation still more clear. Let us suppose that a man goes to a master of the Islamic sciences, who is an expert in the traditional branches of learning and in philosophy as well, and who also acts upon his knowledge, and this man requests the master to teach him philosophy, ancient or modern, so that he may protect himself against the doubts raised by the philosophers with regard to Islamic doctrines, and may also be able to give a satisfactory reply to those who raise such doubts. Apprehending that he might turn out to be insincere, and might finally bring the knowledge of philosophy to the aid of false and anti-Islamic ideas, the master warns him against such an eventuality, and the man takes a pledge that he would not misuse his knowledge. Having satisfied himself, the master gives him a thorough training in philosophy. But the man, contrary to his promise, begins to accept the anti-Islamic and false theorizing of philosophers as the truth. Obviously, in such a case, the teacher can in no way be held responsible for the way the pupil behaves. Similarly, there can be no room for doubting the integrity of these two angels.

Although Allah Himself knows how things were, yet one can suppose that once the angels had done the work assigned to them, they must have been recalled to the Heavens. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

This concludes the commentary for Day 2.