

DAY 20

ANSWER: Madyan

SŪRAH AL-A'RĀF: VERSES 85-87

And (We sent) to Madyan his brother, Shu'aib. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. There has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. And fill the measure and weight in full, and do not make people short of their things, and do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order. That is good for you, if you are believers. [85]

And do not sit in every path threatening, and prevent from the way of Allah the people who believe in Him, and seek- ing a twist in it. And remember the time when you were few, then He increased you in number. And look, how was the fate of the mischief makers. [86]

And if a group from among you has believed in what I have been sent with, and another group has not believed then, keep patience until Allah decides between us. And He is the best of all judges." [87]

COMMENTARY

The series of stories relating to prophets 'alayhum salām continues. The fifth story appears in the verses quoted above. This is the story of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām and his people.

Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām, according to Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, is among the progeny of Madyan, the son of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm 'alayhis salām, and he is also related to Sayyidnā Lūṭ 'alayhis salām. The lineal descendants of Madyan, the son of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm 'alayhis salām also came to be known by the name, Madyan - and the locality where they lived is also called Madyan. Thus, Madyan is the name of a people and the name of a city as well. This city still survives near the port of Ma'ān in Eastern Jordan. When relating the story of Sayyidnā Mūsā 'alayhis salām elsewhere, the Qur'ān says (**And when he arrived at the watering [place] in Madyan - 28:23**), it is referring to this very habitation. (Ibn Kathīr)

The people to whom Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām was sent have been identified by the Holy Qur'ān as the residents or people of Madyan, and also as the people of *Aikah*. The word: (*Aikah*) means a forest.

Some commentators say that these were two different people and lived in separate settlements. Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām was sent to one of them first. When they were destroyed, he was sent to the other. The punishment which came upon these two has also been stated in different words. The punishment of the *Rajfah* on the people of Madyan is mentioned as *Ṣaiḥah* (Sound) at some places, while as *Rajfah* (earthquake) at others. The punishment of the people of *Aikah* has been stated as being that of *Zullah* (shade, canopy). The form in which this punishment came was that the people of *Aikah* were first

subjected to intense heat in their locality which almost roasted them. Then, in the forest close by there came a dense cloud which cast its shade over the entire forest. Attracted by the shade and cool breeze there, all inhabitants of the locality assembled under the shade of that cloud. As Divine arrangement would have it, here were its criminals walking on their two feet and reaching the exact spot where they were to be destroyed, without a warrant of arrest and without a police gun pointed at them. Once they were all there, the clouds rained fire and the earthquake shook the earth. That killed them all.

Then, there are other commentators who say that the people of Madyan and the people of *Aikah* are the same people and the three kinds of punishment mentioned here converged on these people. First came the Fire from the clouds, then, with it, rose the piercing Sound, and then, the earthquake shook the earth. Ibn Kathīr has favoured this view.

However, whether these two people are separate or are two names of the same people, what matters is the message of truth delivered to them by Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām - and that has been mentioned in the first (85) and second (86) verses. Before we move on to the explanation of this message, let us first understand that the essence of Islām, which is the combined call of all blessed prophets, is the fulfilment of mutual rights. Then rights are of two kinds. First come rights which are related directly to Allah Ta'ālā. No visible human gain or loss seems to depend on their fulfilment or abandonment, for example, praying and fasting (Ṣalāḥ and Ṣawm). Secondly, there are the rights of the servants of Allah (Ḥuqūq al-'Ibād: human rights - in secular terminology) which are related to human beings. These people were heedless to and unaware of both these rights, in fact, were acting counter to both.

By not believing in Allah Ta'ālā and His messengers, they were violating the rights of Allah, and on top of it, by decreasing weights and measures, they were slicing through and wasting away the rights of human beings. Then, such people would go on to sit on entry points of roads and streets and would terrorize all comers, rob them of their belongings, and warned them of worse consequences if they believed in Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām. And thus, on God's good earth, they had made disorder the order of the day. It was to correct these misdeeds that Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām was sent to them.

In the first and second verses quoted above, Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām said three things to correct the course of his people: (1) First he said: **(O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him)**. This is the same Da'wah, the call to Tauḥīd, the Oneness of Allah, which all blessed prophets have been giving all along the lanes of time, a call which is the spirit of all true beliefs and deeds. Since these people too were all sold to the worship of the created, and consequently, heedless to the sacred Being and Attributes of Allah Ta'ālā, and thus, neglectful of the fulfilment of His rights. Therefore, this was the first message given to them. (2) Then, it was said: **(There has come to you a clear sign from your Lord)**.

Here, 'clear signs' or proofs refers to the miracles which were manifested at the hands of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām. The different forms in which these miracles had appeared find mention in Tafsīr Al-Baḥr

Al-Muḥīt.

(3) The statement which follows lays down a major rule of just conduct. It was said: **(And fill the measure and weight in full, and do not make people short of their things)**. The word: (*kail*) means measure, and: (*mīzān*) is used in the sense of weighing, and: (*bakhs*) means to bring loss on someone by giving one less than what is due. Thus, the instruction given in the verse is to give full measure and weight and to abstain from causing loss to them by holding back what is their due.

In the first part of the verse, the particular crime of under-measuring or under-weighing in buying and selling was prohibited. Later, by saying: **(and do not make people short of their things)**, the prohibition was generalized. Now the prohibition applies to all kinds of decreasing, slicing, under-cutting or short-changing of rights - whether related to property, or honour, or something else. (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīt)

From here we know that the way it is forbidden to give less than due while weighing and measuring, similarly, forbidden is any cutting back on the human rights of other people. Acts like attacking someone's honour, not giving due respect to someone according to his legitimate station, showing shortcoming in obeying those the showing of obedience to whom is necessary and failing to respect those who must compulsorily and duly be respected are included under the purview of the crime which used to be committed by the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām. During his famous *Khuṭbah* of the Last *Ḥajj*, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ declared that the honour of people is as worthy of being respected and defended as their blood is, stands as a broader confirmation of this view.

All these things are included under the words: (*muṭaffifīn*) and (*tatfīf*) wherever mentioned in the Qur'ān. Sayyidnā Fārūq al- A'zam raḍī'allāhu 'anhu saw a person making his *Rukū'* and *Sajdah* in a hurry. He said: (that is, *you are guilty of measuring and weighing short* - Mu'aṭṭa Imām Mālik). By saying so, he meant that the person had not fulfilled the right of Ṣalāh as it was due. Thus, in this report, the short-coming of not fulfilling the right of Ṣalāh as due has been referred to by the word: (*tatfīf*: measuring and weighing short).

At the end of the verse, it was said: **(and do not make mischief on the earth after it has been set in order)**. This sentence has also appeared earlier in this Sūrah Al-A'rāf (for details, please see comments under **verse 56**) where it was said that the physical betterment of conditions on the earth depends on utilizing things properly - as and where due, respecting limits and maintaining moderation, equity and justice; and spiritual betterment depends on relationship with Allah and obedience to His commands. As for the opposite of it, that is, physical and spiritual disorder on earth, it shows up when these principles are compromised or abandoned. The people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām had done exactly this. They had totally abandoned these principles because of which earth had become a hotbed of physical and

spiritual disorder. That is why they were advised to abstain from such deeds which would serve as corrupting influence for the whole earth.

Then, it was said: **(This is good for you, if you are believers)**. The sense is that should they repent and retract from their evil doings, it has nothing but good waiting for them in their present life as well as in the life to come. As for the prosperity and success in the life to come is concerned, it is obvious that it depends on one's obedience to what Allah has commanded us to do. Then, as for success in the present world, we can say once people find out that there is someone who is honest in weights and measures and is particular about all other rights of his clients, his credit and goodwill will become established in the market and his business will increase in volume and reliability.

Determining the meaning of the statement - **'Do not sit in every path threatening and preventing people from the path of Allah'** - in **verse 86**, some commentators have said that both sentences carry the same sense since these people stopped and threatened those who came to Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām. This they were ordered not to do.

Others have said that these crimes committed by them were two separate crimes. They sat on thoroughfares, looted and snatched things, and also prevented people from believing in Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām. Thus, the first sentence describes the first crime while the second sentence describes the other. The later view has been relied upon in Tafsīr Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ and elsewhere too. Also included under the purview of this command against looting and snatching are check posts set up on thoroughfares to realize impermissible taxes against the provisions of the Sharī'ah.

ʿAllāmah Al-Qurṭubī has said that those who sit on thoroughfares and make people pay undue taxes against the provisions of the Sharī'ah, they too are criminals like the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām - rather, more oppressive and tyrannical than they were.

After that it was said: **(and seeking a twist in it)**, that is, these people are always on the lookout for the opportunity to find something in the way of Allah which they could twist, turn and misrepresent and come up with their roster of doubts and objections through which they could try to wean people away from the true religion.

In the last sentence of **verse 86**, it was said: **(And remember the time when you were few, then He increased you in number. And look, how was the fate of mischief makers)**. The twin aspects of persuasion and intimidation were employed to warn these people. The first was persuasion when they were reminded of the blessing of Allah who increased their insignificant numbers to become a large nation, or changed their economic weakness into need-free financial strength. Then, to chasten them

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through intimidation, it was said that they could do much better if they had a look at the sad end of peoples who had engineered disorder on the earth. The peoples of Nūḥ, 'Ād, Thamūd and Lūṭ were examples of so many different punishments, which should help them understand their own situation and make the correction needed.

In the last **verse (87)**, an answer has been given to scruples of these people about the division in their ranks after some of them believed in the call of Sayyidnā Shu'aib 'alayhis salām while others kept rejecting him. But, there was no difference between them outwardly. Both groups were living comfortably. If being a disbeliever or denier would have been a crime, the criminal would have been punished. To answer that doubt, it was said: that is, do not make haste. Allah Ta'ālā is Forbearing and Merciful. He gives respite to wrongdoers. It is only when they become absolutely wicked and high-handed that the decree of Allah comes into action. The state in which they were was similar. If they remained sticking to their denial, the time was not far when the decisive punishment will overtake the deniers.

This concludes the commentary for Day 20.