

Sūrat Yūsuf

Introduction

Sūrat Yūsuf was revealed in Makkah and has 111 verses.

Except for some verses at the end, the entire sūra talks about the story of Nabī Yūsuf. All the stages of his life are discussed with many interesting details of the conversations that took place. Unlike other sūras all the passages in this sūra are linked to the same story.

The name of Nabī Yūsuf has been mentioned 67 times in the Holy Quran, out of which 65 are there in sūra Yūsuf.

It is a beautiful story with many lessons on faith, trust in God, personal discipline, family relationships . . . etc. Almighty Allah tells us these stories in detail so that we may enjoy the story and also learn from the lessons in the story.

Just like other stories of Prophet Ibrahim (a), Prophet Musa (a), and others, the story of Nabī Yūsuf shows how God can overpower all the plotting of others. What He wants will happen, not what people want, even the most powerful ones. It is the story of miraculous success, which only comes from God who is the Ultimate Planner.

Verses 1-3

Verse 1: الرَّحْمَٰنُ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

Alif Lam Ra. Those are the verses of the Manifest Book.

The first three letters are Hurūf al-Muqatta'at or abbreviated letters. The letters stand for certain words.

The verses are part of a book that is manifest and makes things clear. It guides the intelligence and allows the believer to distinguish between Truth and Falsehood. One who follows the Quran and absorbs its teachings is able to understand things very well. Their understanding might differ from others because faith and belief give a different perspective on things. It gives them a light that makes the straight path very visible and easy to follow.

Verse 2: إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Surely We have sent down it as an Arabic Quran so that you may understand.

The Holy Quran has been revealed in the Arabic language. One reason is that it was the language of the Arabs, and the religion of Islam first started there and spread to the rest of the world. Arab civilization at that time was in ignorance and many of its customs and rituals were inhuman. To bring about a change in society and create a complete transformation Islam had to talk to the people in their own language.

Apart from that, scholars say that the Arabic language is very rich both in vocabulary and syntax. It is able to convey the message of God more aptly than other languages would. The Quran has been translated into so many other languages, but none of the translations can really do justice to the richness of the original language. For those who do not understand the Arabic language it would be good to learn the language and understand first-hand the message of God.

The Quran has been revealed so that its message may be understood. It is not enough to recite and read the translation. Although there is great reward for it, but the ultimate purpose of the Quran is for human beings to really understand what God is telling them and apply it to their lives.

Imam Zaynul Abidin (a) says: *The verses of Quran are a treasure house of knowledge, so whenever the door is opened you should look into it. (Mizānul Hikmah, H.16235)*

Verse 3: نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ

We narrate to you the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran though before this you were certainly one of those who were unaware.

Why has this Sura been named the best of stories?

- 1) It has many interesting elements that are emotionally touching; a young child left in the well, an old father grieving for his son, life in prison, change of fortunes as Nabī Yūsuf becomes a vizier, establishing a rule based on faith and justice.
- 2) It shows the hand of God in every part of the story. The plan of the brothers is nullified by the decree of God who gives Nabī Yūsuf great honor and reunites him with his family.
- 3) It shows the results of evil qualities like lying and jealousy.
- 4) It shows the effects of a dream on the future of a nation.

It is the best of stories but can only be good for us if we take lessons from it and apply them to our lives.

Why does the Quran use stories?

The Quran is a book of guidance that trains the human being. Why does it use stories to teach people?

- 1) Stories show people practical examples from history. Even if people know certain truths, to know the experiences of others and how they lived their lives, makes that knowledge into a reality.

- 2) People find stories interesting. It is a good way of getting attention and attracting people.
- 3) People are more eager to learn from stories than from lessons. Sometimes subtle lessons can be picked up from stories.
- 4) All types of people love stories. Whatever their level of intellect, education, background . . . etc. everyone understands a story.

History is of great benefit to human beings. Imam Ali (a) says in *Nahjul Balāgha* in his will to Imam Hasan (a):

My child, even though I have not reached the age which those before me have, yet I looked into their behaviour and thought over events of their lives. I walked among their ruins till I was as one of them. In fact, by virtue of those of their affairs that have become known to me it is as though I have lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the impure from the clean and the benefit from the harm.

(Letter no. 31, *Nahjul Balāgha*)

The verse ends by saying that before these verses were revealed the Prophet did not know these stories. This is in answer to those who accused the Prophet of getting the Quran from other people. Although the story of Nabi Yūsuf existed with the Jews and Christians many of the details were different. The Prophet was told the true story through Jibra'īl who brought down revelation from Allah.