

Surat al-Qasas Verses 1-3

طس ﴿١﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾ نَتْلُو عَلَيْكَ مِنْ نَبَأِ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِالْحَقِّ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Ta, Seen, Meem. (1) These are the signs of the Clear Book. (2) We relate to you from the story of Mūsā and Fir'aawn with truth, for a people who have faith.

Importance of stories in the Holy Quran

Stories have always been an important part of human life. Even before they could read and write human beings were telling stories. It connected people together and was important in passing on information in an engaging manner. Stories help people derive meaning from the experiences of others.

The Quran narrates many real stories of the past. These stories are a means for educating and training the believers. The history of the Prophets *'alayhimus salām* is narrated through the stories of their experiences. Some stories are repeated with a focus on different aspects of the story to reveal various dimensions of the same story.

Stories and parables have a long history in peoples' lives from ancient times. People use stories to convey the facts and imaginations about the older generation time to the younger one, to maintain the nations' traditions, customs and to transform and to cause to understand these rituals for the training of the young generation. Stories are tools for amusement and even for training

The criteria for a good story are to have a significant message which is narrated in the most engaging manner and which has a reality that refines the human character.

The stories of the prophets were not mentioned in order to give plain information about history or just to pass on stories of the past. They were narrated in order to teach believers and make them draw lessons from various events of the past.

In Quran, various words have been used to describe stories that are narrated:

- 1) *Qasas* (Stories, Narratives) – *We narrate to you the best of narratives, by Our revealing to you this Quran, though before this you were certainly one of those who did not know* (Q 12:3)
- 2) *Naba'* – (Story, Account) - *Relate to them truly the account of Adam's two sons, When the two of them offered an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other.* (Q 5:27)
- 3) *Hadith* (Tradition, Discourse, Narration) - *And has the story of Mūsā come to you? When he saw fire, he said to his family: Wait, Indeed I see a fire, Maybe I will bring you a brand from it, or find some guidance at the fire.* (Q 20:9-10)

Types of stories in the Quran

- 1) Stories of past Prophets including their conversations with God, their miracles, challenges, humbling of their enemies, inviting people to God. Many different events from the lives of Prophets have been discussed in the Quran. The longest story is that of Prophet Mūsā *'alayhis salām*. The most beautiful one as mentioned by the Quran itself is that of Prophet Yūsūf *'alayhis salām*.
- 2) Stories of some past people in which there are lessons for believers. These include the story of the people of Saba', the Companions of the Cave (*ashābul-kaḥf*), the two brothers (in Sūra 18), Sāmiri, Qārūn, and others.
- 3) Stories from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad *sallallāhu 'alayhi wa-ālhi wasallam*. These include narrations of: the battles of Badr, 'Uhud, Ahzāb, the event of Hijrah, the opposition that the Prophet faced from the Quraysh, hypocrites and disbelievers, etc.

Learning from History

To learn Islamic history is to inquire how Allah's ways have worked and His will carried out in the lives of individuals and groups and how His promises have come true. To look at history Islamically is to see the moral, spiritual and ethical dimensions of all episodes in history, however big or small. This is precisely why the Quran makes learning history in some ways an act of faith and a source of wisdom.

The Almighty Allah repeatedly commands the Muslims in the Quran to observe, consider, and reflect upon the lessons from the history of bygone nations. Instructing the Muslims in moral and spiritual history of the earlier nations seems to be one of the major emphases of the Quran. The fact that majority of Allah's Final Message consists of stories of moral struggle of earlier peoples is an indication of the significance of learning history, and learning it with the right perspective of seeking lessons

History is the best way to teach and caution people. The Quran could have been a book of abstract theories of laws that govern societies, or simply a list of do's and don'ts. But the fact that God has chosen story telling as a chief means to caution and education of the humankind necessarily means that humans be inclined to learn from other's examples. Successful believers always have a good grasp of history.

Imam Ali *'alayhis salām* emphasized the studying of history in a detailed advice to his son. *He says: O my child, even though I have not reached the age which those before me have, yet I investigated 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. I have selected for you the choicest of those matters and collected for you their good points and have kept away from you their useless points. (Nahjul Balāgha, Letter 31).*

Further reading material for instructors:

http://jiscnet.com/journals/jisc/Vol_4_No_1_June_2016/15.pdf

<https://www.islamweb.net/en/article/177675/why-islamic-history-i>

<https://www.academyofislam.com/ali-235/>

<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/3366/viewall/story-of-moses/>

<http://www.quranreading.com/blog/story-of-the-prophet-musa-as-a-story-of-optimism/>