

Surat al-Qasas

Verses 4-6

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

Q 28: 4 Surely Fir'awn exalted himself in the land and made its people into parties, weakening one party from among them; he slaughtered their sons and let their women live; surely he was one of the corrupt ones.

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُّوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

Q 28: 5 And We desired to show favor to those who were thought to be weak in the land and make them Imams and make them the heirs.

وَنُمَكِّنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ

Q 28: 6 And establish them in the land and show Fir'awn and Hāmān and their armies them that which they were afraid of.

Words to focus on with cross reference verses

1) عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ – *exalted himself on earth*. Other meanings are: He showed pride, was puffed up. Had power over others and imposed upon them. Believers do not like this type of superiority on earth; see Q 28:83.

2) شِيَعًا – *groups, parties, disunited*. It also means, 'People following one another'. People in power like to divide the masses so they do not revolt against them. Look at how Muslim countries are divided, some supported by Western countries and others by Eastern powers. During colonial rule in India and Africa, the occupying countries divided the people into many groups and encouraged animosity between them.

3) الْمُفْسِدِينَ – *corrupt, spreading evil and wrong*. Fir'awn spread his own overpowering authority, disunited the people. Other meanings are: Spread misery and fear on earth; and being unjust and brutally selfish. Believers forbid corruption on earth – Q 11:116 Qārūn being told not to spread corruption on earth – Q 28:77

4) الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُّوا – *the ones considered weak, the oppressed*. Know that these are not weak but have been made weak due to the force of oppression. There are also those who are weak intellectually, being heavily influenced by those with power and authority. These are the weak in identity who are led by others.

A conversation between the ones who were weak with those who oppressed them –
Q 34:31-33

Fir'awn and the Banu Israel

Fir'awn was a Pharaoh who ruled in Egypt. Pharaoh was a term used for the Kings who ruled ancient Egypt. The Pharaoh who ruled at the time of Prophet Mūsā had enslaved the Banu Israel and treated them harshly. The Banu Israel were the descendants of Prophet Ya'qūb (a). Prophet Yūsuf called his parents and brothers to Egypt after becoming a minister there. The family stayed on in Egypt and over the years became a whole tribe of people. They enjoyed power and position in Egypt. But as their worldly attachments overcame their spirituality their circumstances changed. They faced one of the darkest episodes in their history. A ruthless and cunning Egyptian toppled their government and reclaimed the throne of Egypt and the title Pharaoh.

The Quran refers to the Pharaoh during the time of Prophet Mūsā simply as Fir'awn. Many have tried to identify him. Some say he was Ramses II whose mummified body was found. Others say it was his son Merneptah because of the salt that was found on his body, suggesting that he died in the sea. But there is no conclusive scientific evidence to date that can help us identify which Pharaoh lived and died in the time of Prophet Mūsā.

Fir'awn abased and enslaved the Banu Israel. He forced them to work hard on his constructions and treated them brutally. The people suffered and awaited the savior who would rescue them from Fir'awn. One night, Fir'awn saw a dream in which a ball of fire came to Egypt from Jerusalem and surrounded and burnt its houses. He realized that the rumored savior of the Banu Israel was going to be born. He was determined to prevent this. He called on his court of magicians and sought their counsel. They divined the lineage of the awaited savior and determined that he would be from the Banu Israel and that he was due to be born soon. The Pharaoh gave strict orders to kill every male child that was born to the Banu Israel.

Allah's plan

Although Fir'awn tried all he could to prevent the birth of Prophet Mūsā, he was defeated by God's plan. The baby was born and eventually came to live in the palace of Fir'awn (discussed in later lessons). Verses 5 and 6 tell us that God wanted to favour the ones who were oppressed, and His plan would rescue them despite the efforts of the oppressors. The promises include:

- 1) Favoring (helping) them
- 2) Making them leaders
- 3) Making them inheritors – of the land and kingdom.

- 4) Establishing them on earth – giving them a chance to rule and have authority over their own lives
- 5) Making the oppressors see exactly what they had been afraid of.

This hope giving verse is not only for the Banu Israel but for all those who are oppressed. It was manifested in the establishment of the Muslims in Makkah despite all the efforts of the enemies. And it will be manifested InshāAllah in the establishment of the rule of Imam Mahdi (a) when he establishes justice on earth and defeats the oppressors.

Hāmān was the chief advisor of Fir‘awn and had a huge influence on him. In the Quran, the name of Hāmān is mentioned six times: Q 28:6,8, and 38; Q 29:39: and Q40:24 and 36. Hāmān was among top and influential officials of the government of Pharaoh at the time of Prophet Mūsā.

Hadith

Imam Ali (a) said: The world will bend towards us after having been rebellious as the biting she-camel bends towards its young. (Then Imam recited the Quranic verse 28:5): *And We desired to show favor to those who were thought to be weak in the land and make them Imams and make them the heirs.* *Nahjul Balāgha*, Hadith. 209

Imam Ali Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a): By He who raised Muhammad (s) with the truth, as a bearer of good news and a warner, the virtuous ones from among us the Ahlul Bayt and their followers are like Mūsā and his followers, and our enemies and their followers are like Fir‘awn and his followers. (*Tafsīr Majma’ al-Bayān* in the commentary of these verses)

Connecting topics to other historical events

- 1) God’s plan will always be successful – Yazid’s plan to humiliate the family of Imam al-Husayn (a) in Damascus never succeeded.
- 2) Modern day Pharaohs – So called superpowers who try to weaken opposition, to divide and conquer. Oppressors who ruthlessly hold on to power.
- 3) Disunity among groups – a ploy to weaken the masses.

Links (Disclaimer: not all information is correct; so read cautiously)

<https://www.learnreligions.com/pharaoh-egyptian-god-king-701192>

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mubarak-modern-day-pharaoh_b_816944