

Sūrat al-Mu'min Verses 36-37

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا هَامَانَ ابْنِ لِي صَرْحًا لَعَلِّي أَبْلُغُ الْأَسْبَابَ

Q 40:36 And Fir'awn said: O Haman! build for me a tower that I may attain the means of access.

أَسْبَابَ السَّمَاوَاتِ فَأَطَّلِعَ إِلَىٰ إِلَهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ كَاذِبًا ۗ وَكَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِفِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ
عَمَلِهِ وَصُدَّ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ ۗ وَمَا كَيْدُ فِرْعَوْنَ إِلَّا فِي تَبَابٍ

Q 40:37 The means of access to the heavens, and that I may take a look at the god of Mūsā, Indeed I consider him to be a liar. And thus the evil of his deed was made fair-seeming to Fir'awn, and he was turned away from the way[of Allah], and the plot of Fir'awn only led him to ruin.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why does Fir'awn ask for a tower to be built?
- 2) What happens when an evil deed seems good to the doer?
- 3) What was Fir'awn's plot that led to his ruin?

Commentary

The speech of Hizqil had an effect on the people and Fir'awn realized that. He decided he would not go ahead with his plan to kill the Prophet. But it did not affect his arrogance or his evil desire to plot and gain mastery over the minds of people. He now thinks of a different strategy.

Fir'awn did not have the worthiness and tawfiq to be able to listen to the truth and accept it. He was too hard hearted for that. His deeds had put a seal on his heart and no words of wisdom could enter in and be absorbed. Instead he brushed them aside, now planning to see how he could still defeat the Prophet in another way.

He came up with the idea of having a tower built. He said it would allow him to reach the heavens and see the god of Mūsā. The word صَرْحًا refers to something that is clear and visible. A high tower is visible from afar and hence gets that name.

What was the aim of Fir'awn behind building a tower? Did he really believe that the god of Mūsā was in the sky? And would a tower be high enough to reach the sky? Even the highest mountains can't reach that high. Such foolishness is very unlike Fir'awn who was a cunning person who had held his grip of power on the people for so long. He was a master at control and self-glorification. Such a person always has devious motives and political strategies behind his words.

It is possible that Fir 'awn had the following motives for the tower;

1) As a distraction that would occupy the minds of people for long. The tower would be built on a huge piece of land and would take thousands of people a long time to build. They would need vast amount of resources that would have to be gathered. All this would consume the people and they would not have time or energy to think of the Prophet and his mission. As the tower would rise it would be given much attention and everyone would be talking about it. The media of the time would be devoted to it and people would soon forget the victory of Prophet Musa over the magicians.

Such is the strategy of those who wish to occupy people in trivial things rather than let them probe into deeper, more important matters.

2) Financial gain for people. Through using people to build the tower he would make them dependent on him for their livelihood. They would then not oppose him in fear of losing it. Economic control was a big factor in controlling the people.

3) He perhaps had the idea that he would climb up the tower and then come down to say there was no god and people should not think about it anymore. This would be his way of falsely checking for the truth and then dismissing it.

All his plotting and planning only ended in his own destruction. He was not able to get guidance and the Prophet who he tried to defeat would finally lead him to his own end. The plot was of no use and was actually a loss to himself.

Connecting verses

1) Evil deeds seem good to some people
Q 2:212, 10:12, 47:14

2) Plots of people
Q 8:18, 20:60, 20:64, 20:69, 105:2

Connecting topics

1) Distractions

<https://deenspiration.com/7-ways-to-become-more-focused/>

<https://www.whyislam.org/social-values-in-islam/self-development/distractions/>

2) Strategies of political leaders – distracting the minds of people.

<http://www.thenopebook.com/politics/politicians-distracting-real-issues/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/rewired-the-psychology-technology/201611/trump-the-master-distractor>