

## Sūrat Saba Verse 19

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَقْنَا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ  
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

Q34:19 But they said, ‘Our Lord! Make the stages between our journeys far apart,’ and they were unjust to themselves. We turned them into folktales and scattered them totally. There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful one.

### Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why do you think the people made the request to have the stages of their journey far apart?
- 2) How were they unjust to themselves?
- 3) How do patience and gratitude make you different?

### Commentary

Despite all the blessings they had, the people of Saba chose to be ungrateful and heedless. Their wealth and prosperity intoxicated them and they didn’t want to walk along the same path as the poorer people along their journeys. They prayed that distances between them would increase so the rich and poor could walk along different paths.

There are also other reasons given for this request. This is how Tafsir of Agha Pooya describes it; ‘The people of Saba became increasingly covetous and selfish, departing from the path of righteousness and envying their neighbour’s prosperity and happiness. In order to make more profit the distance between two towns had to be extended, because a few stations which they could monopolise would bring more money. Their grasping nature put aside the moral standards of righteousness. Monopoly in trade and industry not only spreads poverty among people but also destroys the moral fabric of the society.’

Although their pride was directed at the poor people, Allah says in this verse that they wronged their own souls. When a human being acts wrongly, he/she only hurts their own soul. Life is all about doing good to purify and perfect the soul before returning to God. A wrong act, or a wrong thought even, does the opposite and stops the progress of the soul. It hurts the doer first. The smoke that comes out of an inner fire clouds the eyes of the instigator before spreading.

The result of their actions is that they became a story for people to learn from. Their legacy is not a noble one that would be carried on for generations. Their land became so dry and barren that groups of them were forced to travel to different areas, looking for a place to establish themselves. They became scattered across the earth. They had had the potential of becoming a strong and vibrant civilization that would last for centuries. But their ingratitude and heedless

destroyed those chances. They became like a tree whose leaves scatter around in a strong wind. Among the people it became a phrase they used to describe people who were greatly scattered and spread out – ‘they have spread apart like the people of Saba’.

The verse ends with two qualities of people who can learn from the people of Saba – those who are constantly grateful and are very patient. Note that *Sabbar* and *Shakur* are superlatives of the term *Sabir* and *Shakir*, referring to a higher degree of the quality. They are more receptive to lessons learned from stories of the past and would realize the wrong done by the people of Saba.

#### Connecting verses

Bad deeds hurt the soul of the doer – 6:104, 39:41, 45:15, 31:12

Ingratitude and greed – 14:28-29

#### Connecting Topic

Greed

<http://www.shiavault.com/books/the-ahlul-bayt-ethical-role-models/chapters/12-greed>

<https://musliminc.com/quran-and-hadith-on-greed-10821> (Ahle Sunnah site)

<https://en.shafaqna.com/41882/greed/>