

Sūrat Saba
Verse 16-17

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِي أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ
مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ

Q34:16 But they turned aside so We sent upon them a violent flood and replaced their two gardens with two gardens bearing bitter fruit, tamarisk, and sparse lote trees

ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا ۖ وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ

Q34:17 This We requited them with because they disbelieved; and We do not punish any but the ungrateful.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why do you think the people of Saba turned away from the path of Allah?
- 2) What are some ways of being ungrateful?
- 3) what would be the reaction of the people of Saba when they saw how their gardens had become?

Commentary

The people of Saba were not grateful for the blessings that God had granted them. They didn't think much of the blessings and did not appreciate the extent to which they had been blessed. They were heedless of the remembrance of Allah. They were also intoxicated by their wealth. The rich ones became more powerful and ignored the rights of the poor and needy.

Almighty Allah caused a flood to wipe away their gardens and all the blossoming trees in it. The gardens were left with bare trees holding only bitter fruit. Some scholars believe that People of Saba had constructed a great dam called "Arim" to supply water for their farms and gardens, and as a result, their town remarkably flourished. When people denied God and the Prophets sent by Him, the 'Arim Dam was destroyed, leading to a huge flood and the destruction of the town. God sent thirteen Prophets to guide the people of Saba to the right path, but they rejected the Prophets. They denied God and claimed that the blessings of their town were because of their own superiority

There are different views about the meanings of Arim:

- It refers to the flood that destroyed the town
- It refers to the huge rainfalls that led to the flood
- It refers to the dam that had been constructed by People of Saba
- It refers to the rats that caused the destruction of the dam of Ma'rib

The three types of trees mentioned were either harmful, or of little or no use. Instead of nourishing the people the gardens turned into desert like fields which would not produce anything of use to them.

Verse 17 explains that this was the result of their own actions – that of being ungrateful to God. Such a consequence is meted out in different ways to all those who are ungrateful. They cease to enjoy the blessings that God has granted them. The very blessing which would have helped them lead a happy life in this world become harmful or useless. This is a natural consequence of human being's actions. Gratitude helps to increase appreciation in the blessings while ingratitude destroys them. Blessings can increase, decrease, or change, according to one's actions.

It is the Sunnah of Allah – a pattern of action seen often – that those who persist in ingratitude receive the consequence of their deeds. It was not just for the people of Saba but for all times. Thus, the question at the end of verse 17 asks believers to think and become aware of the fact that all those who are ungrateful and deny God will face the consequences of their deeds.

Connecting verses

Gratitude – 14:7, 34:13

Protecting the Earth – 30:41, 13:3, 20:53, 2:30, 67:15

Connecting Topics

1) Preserving the Earth

The Prophet's respect for the Environment

- The earth is introduced as 'a mother' for human beings. The Holy Prophet is quoted as saying:

Preserve the earth because it is your *mother*

- He loved Nature and spent many hours alone in the mountains, reflecting and refreshing his soul.

- He was a farmer and emphasized farming as a noble profession. Almost all the Prophets, he said, were farmers.

- He warned his followers against cutting trees, burning land, and destroying farmland.

- He encouraged planting of trees. He said;

1) When one of you plants a tree and humans or animals or birds eat from that tree, every fruit that is eaten is a charity in the way of God.

2) Whoever waters a dry land and makes vegetation grow in it will receive reward from the Almighty.

2) Even If Resurrection is starting and one of you has a sapling in his hand which he can plant before he stands up he must do so.

- Stories

Planting date trees to free a slave

Salman al-Farsi a companion of the Prophet was a slave. To buy him from his owner the Prophet and his companions planted three hundred date trees in his garden and gave him some money. The owner freed Salman. (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, vol. 1, p. 189)

Salman had asked his master what it would cost to set him free, but the price was far beyond his means. He would have to pay forty ounces of gold and plant three hundred date palms. The Prophet told him to write his master an agreement to pay the gold and plant the trees. Then he called on his

Companions to help Salman with the palms, which they did, one contributing thirty palm-shoots, another twenty, and so on, until the full number had been reached. *“Go dig the holes for them Salman,”* said the Prophet, *“and tell me when you are done, and mine is the hand that shall put them in.”* The Companions helped Salman to prepare the ground, and the Prophet planted each of the three hundred shoots, which all took root and thrived.

Do not throw stones at trees

There was once a boy who lived in the city of Medina who loved to eat dates. The boy could not reach the dates so every day he would come to the tree and throw stones at it so that the dates would fall to the ground and he could eat them. The owners of the trees were very upset, but they didn't know what to do. One of the men said "Let's take him to the Prophet. They brought him to the Prophet. The little boy was very frightened. The Prophet asked him "Why do you throw stones at the tree?" The boy replied, "I love eating dates, and because I cannot reach the sweet dates, I throw the stones so that the dates fall to the ground so I can eat them". The Prophet spoke to the boy kindly and said "Don't you know trees have feelings too? When you throw stones at them, they get hurt and they don't grow very well". The boy looked sad "I'm sorry. I didn't know. I won't throw stones at the trees again". The Prophet (s) smiled and said "If you love dates very much, why don't you wait for the dates to get even more ripe? They will then fall from the trees themselves, and all you have to do is ask permission from these men, and the dates will taste even better.”

2) Gratitude

<https://www.al-islam.org/ahlul-bayt-ethical-role-models-sayyid-mahdi-sadr/gratitude>

<https://en.shafaqna.com/30090/gratitude/>