

Sūrat al-Anbiya
Verse 78-79 (part of 79)

وَدَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِي الْحَرْثِ إِذْ نَفَشَتْ فِيهِ غَنَمُ الْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ شَاهِدِينَ
فَفَهَّمْنَاهَا سُلَيْمَانَ ۗ وَكُلًّا آتَيْنَا حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا

21:78 - And remember Dawood and Sulayman when they gave judgement concerning the field when the sheep of some people strayed into it by night, and We were witness to their judgement.

21:79 - We gave its understanding to Sulayman, and to each We gave judgement and knowledge.

Question for Reflection

- 1) What does this verse tell you about these two Prophets? (they were asked to give judgement, they were wise, respected, God was always guiding them)
- 2) What are some things to remember when asked to judge? (fairness, sincerity, honesty. . .)
- 3) How do judgement and knowledge go together? (to judge fairly requires knowledge of the rules and application of that knowledge which is wisdom)

Commentary

This verse talks about a judgement made by Prophet Dawood (a) and Prophet Sulayman (a). The Quran only mentions this briefly, as a moral lesson for believers. That is the goal of the stories in the Quran. Not to just narrate stories but allow people to learn from the stories of the past. Hadith and the work of Mufassirin (Commentators of the Quran) have given us the details of this story.

The story behind this verse is as follows. The sheep of a certain shepherd entered the field of a farmer nightly and ate the leaves and clusters of fruit from his trees. The shepherd complained to the Prophet about the loss of his livelihood. The owner confirmed that his sheep did venture into the field of the farmer. Prophet Dawood (a) ruled that the owner of the sheep should hand over all his sheep to the owner of the land as compensation for the lost harvest.

Prophet Sulayman (a) who was a young boy at that time had an alternative suggestion. ‘O Prophet of Allah,’ he told his father. ‘Perhaps we can modify this’. ‘How’ asked his father. ‘What do you think we should do?’

Prophet Sulayman respectfully gave his suggestion. Instead of depriving the owner of the sheep entirely, the two claimants should be asked swap their assets for a period of time. The owner of the land would take all the sheep, and benefit from its produce, including wool, milk and ewes. During that time, the owner of the sheep would be given the farm to take care of it until the crops were rehabilitated and the land was restored back to its original condition. Then the two parties could take back their own assets.

A question that arises is why there was differences in the judgements of the two Prophets. Prophet Dawood (a) looked at the loss of the farmer and judged to compensate him. According to the Islamic rules of farming, it is the obligation of the owners of cattle to make sure their animals do not wander away at night and cause damage to others. They are held responsible for this. During the day it is the obligation of the farmers themselves to protect their land from wandering animals. Thus, the owner of the sheep was at fault. Prophet Sulayman (a) agreed with this but just limited the compensation to a certain period of time.

The judgement of Prophet Sulayman (a) was more precise. The farmer had not lost his trees, just the fruits of that year. He should be compensated accordingly. Eventually the trees would give fruit again and he would regain his livelihood. Only his temporary loss needed to be compensated. Also, this form of judgement would not be too hard for the shepherd as well.

According to a hadith of Imam al-Baqir (a) both Prophets discussed and debated their suggested judgements and then the one by Prophet Sulayman was accepted. The son did not negate the father's judgement, just added to it as they discussed. This has also been brought up in hadith as a way of testing Prophet Sulayman and grooming him to be the successor of his father.

In verse 79 Allah affirms the judgment of Prophet Sulayman saying that it was Allah who made him understand it. The verse also confirms that both Prophets had good judgement based on knowledge.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Students will learn that parents must be respected at all times. When discussing or presenting an alternate view it must be done with gentle and polite words/attitudes. (Akhlaq)
- 2) Students will understand that one of the role of Prophets is to judge and help people reconcile conflicts. They do not only preach about worship. Everyday life must be lived justly according to the laws of God. (History)
- 3) Students will see how a good understanding and grasp of things is not possible without the help of God, as in the beginning of verse 79. (Beliefs)

Connecting verses

- 1) Judging with justice - 38:26, 5:49-50

Connecting Topics

- 1) Social Justice

<https://www.al-islam.org/lessons-quran-muhsin-qaraati/social-justice>

<https://www.shiavault.com/books/the-heart-of-islam-enduring-values-for-humanity/chapters/7-chapter-six-divine-and-human-justice/> see Justice in this world – the views of Ali

- 2) Respect for parents

<https://www.al-islam.org/parent-child-relationship/perfect-time>

<https://en.shafaqna.com/66266/the-holy-quran-and-the-parents/>

<https://themuslimvibe.com/muslim-lifestyle-matters/parents/20-brilliant-hadiths-about-parents>