

Sūrat al-Saba'

Verse 14

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنسَأَتَهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ أَن لَّو كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ

34:14 - When We decreed death for him, nothing showed them of his death except a creature of the earth which gnawed away at his staff. And when he fell down, the jinn came to know that if they had known the unseen, they would not have remained in humiliating torment.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) How did Prophet Sulaymān die? What does this tell you about death? (even great Kings have no power over their own death)
- 2) What is the humiliating torment the Jinn were in?
- 3) What is the significance of the stick in the life of the Prophets? (parted the sea for Prophet Musa, revealed the death of Prophet Sulaymān)
- 4) A small creature revealed to the world that Prophet Sulaymān had died. Where else have small creatures played a big role in Islamic history? (birds who dropped pebbles on the elephants of Abraha, rats who ate away at the dam of the people of Saba).

Commentary

The story of Prophet Sulaymān ends with this last verse about his death. The story of his death is a huge lesson for human beings. Even a Prophet of Allah, *'azza wajall*, and a king with such a unique kingdom has no control over death - not over the time when it will come, nor over how it will come. Complete control of that lies in the hands of Allah, *subhanau wata'ala*.

When the death of Prophet Sulaymān occurred, he had been leaning on his stick, overlooking the Jinn who were working. His soul left his body, but the body remained leaning on the stick until a small creature ate away at the stick. When the stick broke, the body fell to the ground. According to some Tafsir he was sitting, and his head rested on the stick. The Quran only says a small creature ate away at the stick. Different narrations say it was an ant, or a termite, or a worm.

Imam Ali (a) says about the death of Prophet Sulaymān;

If there was anyone who could secure a ladder to everlasting life or a way to avoid death it was Sulaymān ibn Dawud (a) who was given control over the domain of the jinn and men along with Prophethood and great position, but when he finished what was his due in food (of this world) and exhausted his time the bow of destruction shot him with arrow of death. His houses became vacant and his habitations became empty. Another group of people inherited them

Khutba #182, Nahjul Balagha

The Jinn had been toiling hard, thinking that the Prophet was watching them. On this particular day the hard work had been assigned to discipline some disobedient Jinn and the work was intense.

Thus, the Quran terms it as 'humiliating torment'. When the body fell the Jinn realized that he had died a while ago. Had they known that, they would have stopped working earlier. They realized that

they did not have knowledge of the unseen. This incident, according to some historians, also made people who believed in the supernatural powers of Jinn, realize that the Jinn had limited knowledge.

It is narrated that during the last years of his life Prophet Sulaymān secluded himself from the people and spent time in worship. He delegated his minister Asif Ibn Barkhiya to look after the affairs of the kingdom. In this way he prepared his people so that they could continue his work after him. A good leader thinks of the legacy he leaves behind and how it can continue without him to achieve the same purpose.

Lessons

- 1) All human beings, however powerful they are, are helpless at the time of death.
- 2) A small creature can bring down a great king like Prophet Sulaymān.
- 3) Jinn are not supernatural beings.

Connecting verses

- 1) Everyone will die – 21:35
- 2) Allah, *subhanau wata'ala*, is close to the human being at the time of death - 56:83-86