

Pharaoh's crimes against the Banu Isra'il

Learning objectives:

- To learn about the similarities between Banu Isra'il and the Muslims.
- To be introduced to some of the crimes committed by Pharaoh against the Banu Isra'il.
- For students to begin memorising Surat al-A'la – verses 1 to 5

The story of Prophet Musa (A) has been narrated in the Qur'an in two different ways. Surat al-Qasas retells the story of Prophet Musa (A) in a chronological order, whereas Surat Taha divulges into the story of Prophet Musa (A) in the form of a 'flashback'.

For the subsequent lessons we will follow the chronological order of events mentioned in Surat al-Qasas with references being made to Surah Taha for a wholesome understanding inshAllah.

Surat al-Qasas [28:1-4]

طسم

Ta. Sin. Mim.

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

These are Verses of the Book that makes (things) clear.

نَتْلُو عَلَيْكَ مِنْ نَبَأِ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِالْحَقِّ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

We rehearse to thee some of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in Truth, for people who believe.

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِّنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ

أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

Truly Pharaoh elated himself in the land and broke up its people into sections, depressing a small group among them: their sons he slew, but he kept alive their females: for he was indeed a maker of mischief.

Verse 3 indicates that the story of Prophet Musa (A) is being narrated to the Holy Prophet (S) and the people who believe, in order to provide an example to the Muslims in Makkah who were facing prosecution and hardship. This narrative of the story of Prophet Musa (A) should bring a sense of hope for the believers in Makkah: "by hearing this story, that how abundant the enemy's power, number of persons, and their forces is, and how the number of believers is apparently little and they are under pressure, the power of Allah is above all and they must not feel weakness in themselves." (An Enlightened commentary, vol. 13)

Reflection:

The same then applies to us! As we await our 12th Imam (AJFS), we should be steadfast and not lose hope, no matter how strong or powerful our enemies may appear. Discuss with the class some of the current difficulties faced by Muslims across the world. (Example: Persecution of Shi'ahs in Yemen and Saudi Arabia).

Verse 4 states some of the major crimes committed by Pharaoh. The first of these crimes was that he elevated his status - he proclaimed himself to be 'god'. His second crime was (as mentioned before) that he split the people into two groups: the native Egyptians (Coptic group) and the Banu Isra'il (Sebtian group).

The Sebtian group was treated as inferior to the Coptic group. History shows us that many tyrants split the people into castes, classes or races, etc, in order to maintain and command power (divide and rule). As long as the people are divided, they will not be able to unite to overthrow or destroy the tyrant leader.

Reflection:

This 'divide and rule' policy can be observed within the Muslim Ummah. Today, Islam is under attack, those against Islam want Muslims to fight each other rather than be united. These people make Muslims fear and blame each other rather than to work together for the greater good. The Qur'an teaches us:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۗ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ
أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ
النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۗ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it, thus does Allah make clear to you His communications that you may follow the right way [3:103]

Pharaoh's third crime was abhorrent. He commanded that for one year, every son born to the Banu Isra'il should be killed. Many baby boys were killed due to this command.

Why did Pharaoh do this?

The Pharaoh saw a dream that a fire emerged from the North, destroying all of Egypt including his palace except for Goshin, leaving all of Banu Isra'il safe. He asked his dream interpreters to explain his dream to him. According to the dream interpreters, the dream meant that a boy (saviour) will be born to the Banu Isra'il and this boy will destroy Pharaoh's power. In the greed to keep his power, he thought he could outwit the plan of Allah (SWT) by commanding that all the newborn boys of Banu Isra'il should be killed.

However, no one can outwit the plan of Allah (SWT), as the following verse states:

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ

And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners. [3:54]