

## 4.2. Historical Perspectives in the Qur'an:

Al-Qur'an is not a book of history which provides a chronological account of rise and fall of kingdoms and empires in the world. The historical perspectives in the Qur'an draw our attention to the disastrous destiny of the peoples and rulers in different parts of the world, at different points of time, for flagrant defiance of the commands of Allah communicated to them by their Prophets. The historical accounts in the Qur'an provide powerful lessons in morality and this is clearly stated in the Qur'an: "There is a lesson in these stories of former people for the men of common sense. The story of Yusuf revealed in the Qur'an is not an invented tale, but a confirmation of previous scriptures – a detailed exposition of all things, and is a guidance and blessing for the people who believe." (12:111)

- **The Qur'an reveals that since the descent of Adam and Eve on earth a chain of Prophets were divinely commissioned from time to time to reform the communities and societies, to beckon them to worship the One and only Allah, liberate them from idol-worship, invite and exhort them to acts of piety and righteousness and prevent them from committing misdeeds and corruption.**
- **The Prophets were divinely commissioned among all the major societies, ethnic groups and communities (An-Nahl – 16:36) and they spoke the language of the people to whom they were commissioned (Ibrahim – 14:4).**
- **All the Prophets were divinely inspired and were gifted with revealed messages and books to guide people to the right path and prevent them from being corrupted (As-Shuara-26: 196).**
- **All the Prophets repeatedly stressed the same message of Unity and Supremacy of Allah (SWT), that He was the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and was alone worthy of worship (As Shura: 42:13). Refer to the following Surah's or chapters: Al-A'raf ( verses 50 to 93); Hud –**

11:25 TO 109); Al-Anbiya – 21:51 to 91); and Al-Shu'ara-26:26 to 191), and many others.

- Most of the people who rebelled against the command of Allah (SWT) by violating the teachings of their respective Prophets were severely punished and even destroyed:
- The people of Nuh(Noah) were drowned in a flood of colossal dimension, but Prophet Nuh (AS), some members of his family, his followers and other living beings ,including birds and animals who gathered in the Ark of Noah were saved. (Hud – 11: 40-49)
- The people of Aad who totally rejected the teachings of Prophet Hud were completely destroyed by a furious blizzard which lasted for eight days and seven nights. (54:20; 69:6-7)
- The Thamud people were very haughty and arrogant. They oppressed and denied poor people accessibility to water from natural springs in their arid region. A miraculous camel was divinely raised as a symbol to provide access of water to the poor. Prophet Salih warned the leaders of Thamud not to harm the camel. The people of Thamud killed the she-camel against the advice of their Prophet Salih and despite his warning that it might result in severe punishment. They were killed by a thunderbolt and an earthquake of enormous magnitude.
- Similarly a powerful earthquake and violent volcanic eruption rained stones on the people of Lut for their unnatural and shameless act of sodomy. They were completely destroyed including the wife of Prophet Lut (Biblical Lot) who conspired with them in their immoral act. (7: 80-84)
- The arrogant Pharaoh was so proud of his authority and powerful army that he contemptuously condemned Prophet Musa and outrightly rejected his teachings. Eventually he was drowned together with his powerful army in the Red Sea whereas Musa escaped with his people.

**While drowning Pharaoh declared his belief in Allah (SWT), but that was too late. The Qur'an also reveals that though the Pharaoh of Musa died as unbeliever (Kafir) his body was saved and later mummified for people to see the fate of a boastful and arrogant Egyptian Pharaoh: "What is most remarkable is the fact that whereas The Old Testament mentions only the perishing of Pharaoh by drowning it is to the unique credit of the Qur'an, which was revealed more than 14 centuries ago that the Almighty Allah had that fateful day ordained the recovery of his corpse, its preservation by mummification and exhibition in the Cairo Museum about 31 centuries after the catastrophic even (in 1881)" (Abdul Majid Daryabad. Tafsiral Qur'an Vol. III Appendix 4, p: 381 and 384) Thus the Qur'an revealed: " So this day We deliver in thy body that you might be a sign to those after you; and verily many of mankind are heedless of Our Signs"( 10: 92)**

### **Musa and Al-Khidr:**

The lesson that we draw from the story of Musa and al-Khidr is that one should ever think that he is the most knowledgeable. Musa was reprimanded by Allah (SWT) and was asked to meet Khidr who was far more knowledgeable than him and of course Allah is the most knowledgeable of all." It is categorically stated Surah Yusuf that "Allah is the one whose knowledge is far greater than all others."(12:76)

The Qur'an also reveals that Allah has given man only a minute fraction of knowledge of the things existing in the universe (17:85). Al-Khidr compared man's knowledge equal to water sticking on the beak of a bird when it dips it in a river.

It was narrated by Ubay Ibn Ka'b that the Prophet stated that Musa got up to deliver a speech before Bani – Israel (children) of Israel. He forgot to say that

Allah (SWT) was most knowledgeable. He was rebuked by Allah who informed him that al-Khidr was more learned than him and was told that he could meet him at the junction of two rivers. Musa instantly left to look for Al-Khidr. Eventually they met at the junction of the two rivers. Musa requested Al-Khidr to impart some of his knowledge to him. Al-Khidr was reluctant because he knew that Musa would not be patient. When Musa insisted he agreed but told Musa not to question his actions. Musa agreed. Al-Khidr made a hole at the bottom of a boat they were sailing, Musa criticized this damaging action. Similarly when Al-Khidr killed a child Musa was mad at him that he killed an innocent lad. Al-Khidr reminded him of his promise to keep quiet and not to question him. Musa again promised and stated that if he queried again they should part company. Meanwhile they entered a village where Al-Khidr repaired a collapsing wall. They were hungry but village people refused to feed them. Musa could not check himself and intervened again saying that Al-Khidr should have charged the villagers for fixing the wall. Thereafter they agreed to part company. Before Musa's departure Al-Khidr explained to him that whatever he did was commanded by Allah(swt). For instance all the serviceable boats belonging to the poor sailors would be confiscated by their tyrant ruler. The boat was made defective to enable the poor sailor to retain their boat to earn their living. The boy was killed because he would have rebelled against God and his pious parents and would have been a source of immense nuisance to them. The dilapidated wall was repaired because underneath was buried a treasure which belonged to two orphans. It was repaired to enable them to utilize the treasure on reaching adulthood.

### **The Story of Qarun ( Korah):**

We can draw poignant moral lessons from the story of Qarun (28: 78-82), who was the first cousin of Prophet Musa. He was extremely rich. The bunch of keys of his treasure house was so heavy that even groups of strong men would fail to

hold them for Long. Hence the Keys would be carried on 60 mules. Because of his wealth he was very haughty and proud. He had the habit of making ostentatious display of his wealth. Whenever Qarun came out with his magnificent regalia, wearing his fine clothes, accompanied by his fine horses, his servants etc. the worldly-minded people would be greatly impressed by his enormous wealth and worldly splendour and would wish the same for themselves. But Qarun's wealth, pride and arrogance led him to deep abyss when Allah "caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling place. Then he had no one to help him against Allah, nor was he one of those who could save themselves. And those who desired his position the day before, began to say "Know you not that it is Allah who expands the provision or restricts to whomsoever He pleases of His servant." (28: 81-82)

Hence the moral lesson is that one should not be proud, haughty and arrogant on achieving some distinction in life or amassing wealth but should always be humble and grateful to Allah for his bounties. (Tafsir Ibn Kathir Vol. 17, pp 441-447)

These historical events of the past should serve as eye opener to the dictators, arrogant and powerful monarchs and Presidents to be watchful of their consequences of their arrogant behaviour and oppressive deeds in this world for there is an authority superior to them and keeping vigilant watch over their words and deeds, for Allah can see and hear everything and nothing can be concealed from him.

Prophet Shuayb was assigned the territory of Madyan located in the Arab Peninsula north of modern Jordan. The Arabs who lived there were mainly traders and indulged in enormous malpractices such as giving short measure in trading transactions, indulging in highway robbery, spreading mischief, disturbing peace and creating lawlessness. In addition the Midianites were idolaters. Shuayb (AS) preached against idol worship invited them to worship only Allah. He also warned them against corruption and "not to create mischief

after things have been set in order” (7:85). The arrogant leaders of Madayan rejected the message of Shuayb, defied the commands of Allah and like the people of Thamud were destroyed by a powerful earthquake and lay buried right in their own homes (7:91; 11: 94-95). It may be mentioned that Prophet Shuayb of Madayan was different from Shuayb or Biblical Jethro who was father-in-law of Moses. Prophet Shuayb who was the great grandson of Prophet Abraham and Katura, was approximately 300 to 400 years before Prophet Moses who started his mission nearly 400 or 600 years after Abraham (Abdullah Yousuf Ali – The Holy Qur’an – notes 1054-1056 pp. 368-369) and (Tafsir Majid Daryabadi – note 575 p: 128 Vol. II).

### **Story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph)**

The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in Surah Yusuf (Chapter 12) instantly reminds one of the Qur’anic verse 26 of Surah ale-Imran (chapter 3) “O Allah! Master of all the kingship, you give the kingdom to whom you so please and take away the kingdom from whomever you please; you give honour to whom you so please and disgrace whom you so please.” Yusuf’s stepbrothers harassed him and tried to disgrace and humiliate him to the maximum extent. But by the grace of Allah he was destined to be a Prophet and a high-ranking Minister of a powerful kingdom and in the end his stepbrothers, who attempted to humiliate him, had to prostrate before him. Another strong moral lesson that we draw from the story of Yusuf is that one should never be revengeful in moments of success and glory. Despite the extreme humiliating behaviour of his stepbrothers he was kind and gracious to them. He resettled them in Egypt (Kanaan) and treated them generously.

### **Prophet Muhammad (saws)**

Since Islam was the religion of all the prophets the Messages of the prophetic missions of all the preceding prophets were subsumed and epitomized in the Prophetic mission of Muhammad (saws). Thus the divinely ordained prophetic missions culminated in his mission and he was declared the Last of the prophets.

In view of the culmination of prophetic mission the universality of his mission and messages was also proclaimed. Prophet Muhammad (saws) was designated as “Mercy unto all mankind” and the Qur’an as the “book of guidance for all mankind.”

There are two distinct periods in the Prophetic mission of Muhammad (saws), the Makki and Madani periods lasting thirteen and ten years respectively. The Makki period was marked for its trials and tribulations testing severely the patience and perseverance, consistency, sincerity, firmness of commitment and persistence in his missionary activities. It is also notable for two traumatic events, one was the first revelation, which sent shivers through his body, and he was completely shaken. The second was Me’raj, his nocturnal journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and from the Dome of Rock in Jerusalem to his ascent to seventh Heaven to witness the miracles and glories of Allah’s creation (17:1). The event of Me’raj marked the pinnacle of his prophet hood.

### **Prophet Muhammad’s Nocturnal Journey: From Makkah to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and Ascent to Heaven--- “Sidratul Muntaha”**

The miraculous nocturnal journey of the Prophet was performed in two stages. In the first stage he was teleported from Kabah (Masjid al-Haram) to Jerusalem on a Burraq, a miraculous heavenly creature where all the preceding prophets were brought together and Muhammad had the distinction to lead them in prayer. That he had visited Jerusalem on that particular night was confirmed by Elijah (Ilyas) the Patriarch of Jerusalem who was then present in the court of Roman Emperor Heraclius (Harqul). (Tafsir Ibn Kathir (English – Vol. 5 pp: 575) Elijah was that night posted as the guard of the Masjid Al-Aqsa. He could not shut the gates of the Mosque because “it was fixed to a rock of the mosque and it appeared that some animal was tethered to the gate.” (Mednt monograph 9, p:56). From the “Dome of the Rock” the Prophet was carried by “Burraq” to the seventh Heaven upto the lute tree (Sidratul Muntaha) where he witnessed the

splendours of God's creation and during that period his attention was fully focused in witnessing those divine glories ( 53: 12-18).

In the light of Qur'anic revelations and latest scientific discoveries tele-transportation is an emerging reality. Most of the scientific fictions displayed on TV screen are based on teleportation. The Qur'an itself revealed in Surah Saba (chapter 34) that the jewel bedecked beautiful throne of Queen Sheba (Bilqis) of Yemen was teleported from Yemen to Jerusalem, a distance of over 3000 miles, in a split second. Finally Allah ordered the descent of Adam from Heaven to Earth, the same Allah commanded the ascent of Prophet Muhammad (saws) from Earth to Heaven and back. The Journey was completed in seconds and demonstrated admirably the unexcelled supreme power of Allah (SWT). Exegetists are divided if the Prophet had an audience with Allah, presumably not, because couple of verses in the Qur'an ruled out that possibility, 42:51 and 6:103. They categorically state that Allah (SWT) does not address human beings face to face and human beings including prophets cannot sight Him as happened with Musa (7:143). Even Prophet Muhammad said that no one will be able to see Allah in this world. Lady Aisha, wife of the Prophet, categorically stated that during his ascent to Heaven the Prophet (saws) did not directly see Allah.

#### **Unique Gifts to Prophet Muhammad at Sidratul Muntaha:**

**It is stated in Tafsir Ibn Kathir Vol. 2 (p: 101-102) that when the Prophet was at Sidratul-Munlaha he received four unique gifts from Allah (SWT) not bestowed on any of the Prophets preceding him.**

**1. Five times daily Salah for Muslims was made obligatory during this heavenly visit of the Prophet. It was originally fifty daily Salah but at the persistent request of the Prophet (saws) it was reduced to five while reward for 50 Salah was retained if Muslims offered regularly these five times daily prayers.**



2. The opening seven verses (Surah-al-Fatiha);
3. The last two verses of chapter 2 – Surah Al-Baqarah (285 and 286); and
4. That the sins of all those will be pardoned who believed in the Unity of Allah and did not join partners with Him.

- The Makki period ended with the migration of the Prophet to Madina.
- The Madani period is marked for a number of notable events:
- The Qiblah of Muslims was changed from Jerusalem to Kabah;
- The first Islamic state was founded where the Shariah laws, as prescribed in the Qur'an, were implemented by the Prophet (saws).
- It was in Madina, after the establishment of the Islamic state that the Prophet issued the Charter of Madina. In this Charter the Jews were declared a nation or Ummah of Madinah along with the Muslims and “verily the Jews will bear their expenses (of war) and the Muslims shall bear their expenses, and verily there will be aid between them as against those who fight parties (ahl) to this document (sahifah) and there will be sincere counsel and well wishing between them; there shall be fulfillment of pledge and no violation” (Moinul Haq – Ansar Zahed-- Life of Muhammad: 1996, page 260).
- The most spectacular event of the Madani period was the conquest of Makkah. It was almost bloodless march into Makkah where the unbelievers surrendered without an iota of resistance. The Prophet returns to Makkah triumphantly with honour and dignity where he was harassed tortured brutally for almost ten years. But in his moment of glorious triumph the victorious Muhammad was an epitome of humility and treated the vanquished unbelievers of Makkah with magnanimity and unexcelled generosity which has no parallel in the Annals of History. He granted them unconditional amnesty saying, as Yusuf said to his half brothers “There is no blame on you today. May Allah forgive you. He is the most merciful of those who show mercy.” (12:92).

**The first act that the Prophet did on arriving in Madinah was to purchase a plot of land to build Masjid Nabavi (Prophet's Mosque), the last of the Three most sacred Mosques in Islam. The first was Kabah (Masjid Al-Haram), which was built by Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail. The second was Masjid Al-Aqsa, which was built by Ishaq (Isaac) and according to a Tradition of the Prophet (saws) forty years after the construction of Kabah. (Tafsir Ibn Kathir Vol. 2 p: 217)**

Of the three Mosques Masjid Al-Aqsa is greatly revered by all the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Temple Mount, built by Solomon, was located within the precincts of Al-Aqsa Mosque and contained the sacred relics of Moses and Harun. It is in the temple mount that Jesus was named and circumcised. It is within this temple Jesus started his mission against corruption in Jewish society. It is also a distinct part of Islamic heritage for it is in the Aqsa Mosque that Prophet Muhammad led all the Prophets in prayer and from the Dome of the Rock adjacent to Aqsa Mosque that he ascended to Seventh Heaven with arch angel Jibrael. Thus Jerusalem should be a strong unifying element of the three monotheistic religions. Muhammad is the only Prophet who unifies these divinely blessed, holiest of holy places on earth. The strong unifying legacy of Jerusalem should be preserved strengthened. Leaders of the three religions should sit together in a spirit of mutual accommodation to restore the unity, sanctity and spiritual grandeur of the precincts of Al-Aqsa and Temple Mount in order to ensure the return of Jesus. (For further details see monograph 12 : The Three Sacred Mosques.)