



# The Infallibility of Prophets

LESSON 4: THE CASE OF PROPHET IBRAHIM, MUSA AND YUNUS

# The Case of Ibrahim

- There are some verses in the Quran that apparently attribute sins and wrong doings to Prophet Ibrahim. We shall look at the three most important such examples.

# The Case of Ibrahim

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ عَازَرَ أَتَتَّخِذُ أَصْنَامًا ءَالِهَةً إِنِّي أَرَأَيْتَكَ  
وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

**[REMEMBER] WHEN IBRAHIM SAID TO HIS UNCLE, AZAR,  
“DO YOU TAKE IDOLS FOR GODS? SURELY I SEE YOU AND  
YOUR PEOPLE IN MANIFEST ERROR.”**

QURAN 6:74

# The Case of Ibrahim

وَكَذٰلِكَ نُرِيْٓ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ مَلَكُوْتِ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَلِيَكُوْنَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِيْنَ

**THUS WE WERE SHOWING IBRAHIM THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH SO THAT HE MIGHT BE OF THOSE WHO ARE CERTAIN."**

QURAN 6:75

# The Case of Ibrahim

فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ

**SO WHEN THE NIGHT OUTSPREAD OVER IBRAHIM, HE SAW A STAR; HE SAID, "THIS IS MY LORD." BUT WHEN THE STAR SET [IN THE MORNING,] HE SAID, "[THIS CANNOT BE MY LORD BECAUSE IT HAS PASSED AWAY,] I DO NOT LIKE THE TRANSITORY [GODS].**

QURAN 6:76

# The Case of Ibrahim

فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ

[ON THE NEXT NIGHT,] WHEN HE SAW THE MOON RISING, HE SAID, “THIS IS MY LORD.” BUT WHEN THE MOON SET HE SAID, “IF MY LORD HAD NOT GUIDED ME, THEN I SHALL SURELY BE OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE ASTRAY.”

QURAN 6:77

# The Case of Ibrahim

فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسُ بِأَرْزَاقِهَا قَالَتْ هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ  
قَالَتْ يَنْقُومُ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ

[IN THE MORNING,] WHEN IBRAHIM SAW THE SUN RISING, HE SAID, “THIS MUST BE MY LORD [BECAUSE] THIS IS GREATER [THAN THE STAR AND THE MOON!]” BUT WHEN THE SUN SET, HE SAID, “O MY PEOPLE, SURELY I AM FREE FROM WHAT YOU ASSOCIATE [WITH GOD.]

QURAN 6:78

# The Case of Ibrahim

أَنَا وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا  
مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

**I HAVE SINCERELY TURNED MYSELF TO HIM WHO  
ORIGINATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, AND I AM  
NOT ONE OF THE POLYTHEISTS.”**

QURAN 6:79



# THE CASE OF IBRAHIM

- These Quranic verses have been used as a proof of the evolutionary phases of Ibrahim from polytheism to monotheism. This is, obviously, an incorrect reading of the Quran.

# THE CASE OF IBRAHIM

- This entire passage quoted above actually shows that Prophet Ibrahim was actively engaged in combating idol - and nature-worshipping. Reading the whole passage does not raise any problem about the 'ismah of Prophet Ibrahim. He did not raise the possibility of the star, the moon and the sun being gods as a fact; it was raised only as a part of his method of disproving such a possibility. In debates, it is quite common to initially accept the view of your opponent in order to lead him to your own view.

# THE CASE OF IBRAHIM

- If you read the first part of the passage where Ibrahim is disputing with his own uncle against idol-worshipping and also Allah's statement that “We were showing...so that he might be of those who are sure [of their faith],” it shows that he was a true believer before he engaged in debate with the idol- and nature-worshippers.

# THE CASE OF IBRAHIM

- Even the passage where he says, “If my Lord had not guided me, then I shall surely be of the people who have gone astray,” is a conditional statement. It says “if” and “then”. And since the first part did not take place, therefore the second part is not relevant.

# The Case of Ibrahim

In pursuit of his mission against idol-worshipping, Ibrahim one day smashed all the all idols of the temple except the big one. Then the Quran says:

قَالُوا مَنْ فَعَلَ هَذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يذُكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ قَالُوا فَأْتُوا بِهِ عَلَيْنَ الْغَيِّبِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُونَ

[The idol-worshippers] said, "Who has done this to our gods? He surely must be one of the unjust people." [Some of them] said, "We have heard a youth speaking [ill] of them, and he is known as Ibrahim..."

Quran 6:59-61



# The Case of Ibrahim

قَالُوا ءَأَنْتَ فَعَلْتَ هَذَا بِاللَّهِتِنَا يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ  
هَذَا فَسْأَلُوهُمْ إِنْ كَانُوا يَنْطِقُونَ

They said, "Have you done this to our gods, O Ibrahim?" He said, "Rather, this - the largest of them - did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak."

Quran 21:62-63



# The Case of Ibrahim

- The objection against 'ismah is that if Ibrahim was ma'sum, how could he lie? Again, if we look at the entire passage, we see that Ibrahim wanted to make his people realize that idols are not worth worshipping—if they cannot defend themselves or even talk, then how can they help you.
- Secondly, Ibrâhîm's answer is conditional: "...if they can speak." Ibrahim's answer was rhetorical and intended to force the people to think.



# The Case of Ibrahim

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى قَالَ أُولَئِم تُوْمِن قَالَ  
بَلَى وَلَكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ  
إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَى كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا  
وَأَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

And [mention] when Ibrahim said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [God] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied." [God] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that God is Exalted in Might and Wise."





# The Case of Ibrahim

- Some people use this incident as a proof that Ibrahim did not believe in resurrection. This is absolutely incorrect. The question and answer are themselves very obvious that he believed. “Certainly [I believe].”
- **Then why did he ask for a demonstration of resurrection?**
- Firstly, Ibrahim surely believed in God's power of giving life to dead. However, this was a belief based on the revelation of Allah just as we believe in it based on the information reached to us through the prophets and the Imams.

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# The Case of Ibrahim

- Secondly, Ibrahim wanted to elevate the level of his belief from “information” to “demonstration”. According to traditions, one day Ibrahim saw a dead fish, half in the water, the other half outside the water. He also saw that sea creatures were eating away one half of the fish and land animals were eating away the other half. This incident made Ibrahim wonder about the issue of resurrection. We are using the word “wonder” not “doubt”. This is when he had the desire of seeing a demonstration of God's power of resurrection,



# The Case of Ibrahim

- In conclusion, Ibrahim believed in resurrection before as well as after this event. The difference is that his belief prior to this event was based on the information about the future revealed to him by God; whereas after this event, his belief in resurrection was based on visual demonstration done by him with God's permission. This is similar to a Muslim who has been to hajj: before his journey, he believed that the Ka'bah existed; but the basis of his belief changed after his journey—now he has seen the Ka'bah with his own eyes.





# The Case of Musa

وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَى حِينٍ غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَهَذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَاسْتَغَاثَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَوَكَزَهُ مُوسَى فَقَضَى عَلَيْهِ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ مُّضِلٌّ مُّبِينٌ

And he entered the city at a time when its people were not watching: and he found there two men fighting,- one of his own religion, and the other, of his foes. Now the man of his own religion appealed to him against his foe, and Musa struck him with his fist and made an end of him. He said: "This is from the work of Satan: for he is an enemy that manifestly misleads!"

Quran 28:15



# The Case of Musa

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي فَغَفَرَ لَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ  
الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

He said, "My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, so forgive me," and He forgave him. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

Quran 28:16



# The Case of Musa

- What Musa did was not a crime; he went to help an oppressed person and, in the process, struck a blow with his fist at the oppressor. This ended, unexpectedly, in the death of the oppressor. Helping an oppressed person is a praiseworthy act in itself. The death of the oppressor, at most, can be labeled as accidental death that is not a crime or a sin.
- The sentence that “this is the work of Satan” refers to the mischief started by the oppressor himself.



# The Case of Musa

- As for the sentence that “My Lord I have surely been unjust to myself,” this must be interpreted in light of the meaning of dhulm explained in the case of Prophet Adam Its correct translation would be: “My Lord I surely have put myself into harm” – after the accidental death of the oppressor, Musa was pursued by the people of Pharaoh.



# The Case of Musa

**As for the how do you explain the sentence after that which says that “ighfir li” which means “forgive me” and “ghafara” which means that God “forgave him”?**

- The common meaning of ghafara (forgiving) is not applicable here. The word “ghafara” also means “to watch over someone” or “to guard someone” or “to cover something [i.e., protect it]”. This second meaning does not imply any sin; it just means that by accidentally killing the oppressor, Musa found himself in harm and trouble from the people of Phroah; and, therefore, he prays “...therefore, guard me and God guarded him.”





# The Case of Yunus

وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغْضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

And (remember) Yunus, when he went away in anger; and he thought that We would never have power over him (naqdira). Then he called in the darkness [of night, sea, and fish]: “There is no god but You, glory be to Thee; surely I am one of the unjust

Quran 21:87



# The Case of Yunus

فَأَسْتَجِبْنَا لَهُ، وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers.

Quran 21:88



# The Case of Yunus

## 1. Was Yúnus angry at Allah?

The most that this verse says is that Yúnus went away in anger; it does not say that he was angry with God. So we have no choice but to interpret this verse by saying that Yúnus left the people while he was angry with them for not believing him.



# The Case of Yunus

- Some people have taken the word naqdira in the meaning of “having power,” thus imply that Yúnus went away in anger thinking that God “would never have power over him”. Firstly, if this meaning is to be taken seriously, then Yúnus would become a kafir, an unbeliever!



# The Case of Yunus

- Secondly, the word naqdira (which is from qadr) has been used many times in the Qur'an for “restricting of the provision” by Allah. For example, in chapter 13, verse 26, God says,

اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَفَرِحُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا  
الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَعٌ

God expands provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]. And they rejoice in the worldly life, while the worldly life is not, compared to the Hereafter, except [brief] enjoyment.



# The Case of Yunus

- In conclusion, we can say that the first sentence of the passage under discussion means: And (remember) Yunus, when he went away in anger; and he thought that We would never straiten [the provision] over him.” This, at most, means that Yunus thought that because he was God's prophet, his Lord would never straiten his provision for him; he had taken God's provision for granted. It has nothing to do with issue of God having no power over him.



# The Case of Yunus

**If Yunus had committed no sin by leaving his people, then why did he say that, “surely I am one of the the unjust”?**

- The word ظلم does not necessarily imply “injustice” and “sin”. It also means “to make haste” and “to come to harm”. Any of these two meanings are compatible with the concept of 'ismah and also correct in the case of Prophet Yunus