

Surah 21, Al Anbiya Mecca 73

The Quran's Text & Yusuf Ali's Translation:

وَدَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِي الْحَرْثِ... ^{up}

78. And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field

إِذْ نَفَسَتْ فِيهِ غَنَمُ الْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ شَاهِدِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night: We did witness their judgment.

فَفَهَّمْنَاهَا سُلَيْمَانَ... ^{up}

79. To Solomon We inspired the (right) understanding of the matter:

[**Ali's comments:** 2732. The sheep, on account of the negligence of the shepherd, got into a cultivated field (or vineyard) by night and ate up the young plants or their tender shoots, causing damage, to the extent of perhaps a whole year's crop. David was king, and in his seat of judgment he considered the matter so serious that he awarded the owner of the field the sheep themselves in compensation for his damage. The Roman law of the Twelve Tables might have approved

of this decision, and on the same principle was built up the Deodand doctrine of English Law, now obsolete. His son Solomon, a mere boy of eleven, thought of a better decision, **where the penalty would better fit the offence**. The loss was the loss of the fruits or produce of the field of vineyard: the corpus of the property was not lost. Solomon's suggestion was that the owner of the field or vineyard should not take the sheep altogether but only detain them long enough to recoup his actual damage, from the milk, wool, and possibly young of the sheep, and then return the sheep to the shepherd. David's merit was that he accepted the suggestion, even though it came from a little boy:

Solomon's merit was that he distinguished between corpus and income, and though a boy, was not ashamed to put his case before his father.

But in either case it was God Who inspired the true realisation of justice. He was present and witnessed the affair, as He is present everywhere.]

...وَكُلًّا آتَيْنَا حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا...

to each (of them) **We gave Judgment and Knowledge;**

...وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُودَ الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ...

it was Our power that made the hills and the birds celebrate Our praises with David:

[**2733**. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth celebrates the praises of God: 17:44; 57:1; 16:48-50. Even the "thunder repeateth His praises": 13:13.

All nature ever sings the praises of God. David sang in his Psalms, 148:7-10: "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye ... mountains and all hills; ... creeping things and flying fowl!" **All nature sings to God's glory**, in unison with David, and angels, and men of God. Cf. 34:10 and 38:18-19. (R).]

...وَكُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ (٧٩)

it was We Who did (these things).

Transliteration: Fafahhamnah sulaymana wakullan atayna **hukman waAAailman** wasakhkharna maAAa dawooda aljibala yusabbihna waalttayra wakunna faAAaileena

Muhammad Asad's Translation:

21:78 AND [remember] David and Solomon - [how it was] when both of them gave judgment concerning the field into which some people's sheep had strayed by night and pastured therein, and [how] We bore witness to their judgment: 70

(21:79) for, [though] We made Solomon understand the case [more profoundly], yet We

vouchsafed unto both of them sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong]. 71 And We caused 72 the mountains to join David in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise the birds: 73 for We are able to do [all things].

Muhammad Pickthall's Translation:

21:79 And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and unto each of them We gave judgment and knowledge. And we subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof).

[**Asad comments** 70 For an elucidation of the story - or, rather, legend - to which the above verse alludes, we must rely exclusively on the Companions of the Prophet, since neither the Qur'an nor any authentic saying of the Prophet spells it out to us. However, the fact that **a good many Companions and their immediate successors (tabi'un) fully agreed on the substance** of the story, differing only in one or two insignificant details, seems to indicate that at that

period it was already well-established in ancient Arabian tradition. (cf note 77 below).

According to this story, a flock of sheep strayed at night into a neighboring field and destroyed its crop. The case was brought before King David for judicial decision. On finding that the incident was due to the negligence of the owner of the sheep, David awarded the whole flock - the value of which corresponded roughly to the extent of the damage - as an indemnity to the owner of the field. David's young son, Solomon, regarded this judgment as too severe, inasmuch as the sheep represented the defendant's capital, whereas the damage was of a transitory nature, involving no more than the loss of one year's crop, i.e., of income. He therefore suggested to his father that the judgment should be altered: the owner of the field should have the temporary possession and usufruct of the sheep (milk, wool, new-born lambs, etc.), while their owner should tend the damaged field until it was restored to its former productivity, whereupon both the field and the flock of sheep should revert to their erstwhile owners; **in this way the plaintiff would be fully compensated for his loss without depriving the defendant of his substance**. David realized that his son's solution of the case was better than his own, and passed judgment accordingly; but since he, no less than Solomon, had been inspired by a deep sense

of justice, God - in the words of the Qur'an - "bore witness to their judgment".]

71 I.e., the fact that Solomon's judgment was more profound did not disprove the intrinsic justice of David's original judgment or deprive it of its merit.

72 Lit, "We compelled".

73 A reference to the Psalms of David, which call upon all nature to extol the glory of God - similar to the Qur'anic verses, "The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain" (17:44), or "All that is in the heavens and on earth extols God's limitless glory" (57:1).

77 In this as well as in several other passages relating to Solomon, the Qur'an alludes to the many poetic legends which were associated with his name since early antiquity and had become part and parcel of Judaeo-Christian and Arabian lore long before the advent of Islam. Although it is undoubtedly possible to interpret such passages in a "rationalistic" manner, I do not think that this is really necessary. Because they were so deeply ingrained in the imagination of the people to whom the Qur'an addressed itself in the first instance, these legendary accounts of Solomon's wisdom and magic powers had acquired a cultural reality of their own and were, therefore, eminently

suited to serve as a medium for the parabolic exposition of certain ethical truths with which this book is concerned: and so, without denying or confirming their mythical character, the Qur'an uses them as a foil for the idea that **God is the ultimate source of all human power and glory**, and that all achievements of human ingenuity, even though they may sometimes border on the miraculous, are but an expression of His transcendental creativity.]