

The Story of the People of the Ditch

In many places in the Qur'an, Allah speaks about the believers of the past who struggled and suffered for the faith and for Islam. One such people are a group commonly known as 'The People of the Ditch'. Allah Ta'ala mentions in the Noble Qur'an:

“Cursed were the People of the Ditch. Fire supplied [abundantly] with fuel, When they sat by it [the Fire]. And they witnessed what they were doing against the Believers [i.e. burning them]. They had nothing against them except that they believed in Allah, the Almighty, Worthy of all praise! The One to Whom belongs the dominion of the Heavens and the earth. And Allah is Witness over everything. Verily those who put to trial the believing men and the believing women [by torturing them and burning them] and then do not turn in Repentance [to Allah will have the torment of Hell and they will have the Punishment of the Burning Fire.” (85:4-10)

Further detail regarding the People of the Ditch and an explanation of these verses can be found in the following hadith of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam).

Suhayb al-Rumi (radhiAllahu anhu) reported that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said: “There lived a king before you and he had a court magician. As the magician grew old, he said to the king: I have grown old so send some young boy to me so that I should teach him magic. So the king sent to him a young man so that he should train him in magic.

On his way to the magician the young man found a monk sitting there. The young man listened to the monk's talk and was impressed by it. It became his habit that on his way to the magician he met the monk and sat there and he came late to the magician. The magician beat him because of the delay. The boy complained of that to the monk so the monk advised him: When you feel afraid of the magician, say: Members of my family had held me back. And when you feel afraid of your family you should say: The magician held me back.

It so happened that one day, there came a huge beast and it blocked the pathway of the people, so the young boy said: I will come to know today whether the magician is superior or the monk is superior. He picked up a stone and said: O Allah, if the work of the monk is more beloved to You than the work of the magician, then cause death to this animal so that the people should be able to move about freely. He threw that stone towards it and killed the animal and the people began to move about (on the path freely).

The young man then came to that monk and told him. The monk said: O my son, today you are surpassed me. Your affair has come to a stage where I find that you would be soon put to a test, and in case you are put to a trial don't give me away by telling them about me. That young man began to treat the blind and those suffering from leprosy and he in fact began to cure people from (all kinds) of illness.

When a companion of the king who had gone blind heard about him, he came to him with numerous gifts and said: 'If you cure me all these things collected together here would be yours.' The boy said: 'I myself do not cure anyone. It is Allah Who cures and if you affirm faith in Allah, I shall also supplicate Allah to cure you. He affirmed his faith in Allah and Allah cured him and he came to the king and sat by his side as he used to sit before. The king said to him: Who restored your eyesight? He said: My Lord. Thereupon he said: It means that your Lord is One besides me? He said: 'My Lord and your Lord is Allah.' So the king took hold of him and tormented him till he gave away that boy.

The young man was thus summoned and the king said to him: 'O boy, it has been told to me that you have become such an expert in your magic that you cure the blind and those suffering from disease and you do such and such things.' Thereupon he said: 'I do not cure anyone; it is Allah Who cures.' The king took hold of him and began to torment him. So he gave a clue of the monk. The monk was thus summoned and it was said to him: 'You should turn back from your religion.' He, however, refused to do so. He ordered for a saw to be brought (and when it was done) he had it placed in the middle of his head and sawed him in half. Then the courtier of the king was brought and it was said to him: 'Turn back from your religion.' He refused to do so, and the saw was placed in the middle of his head and was sawed in half.

Then that young boy was brought and it was said to him: 'Turn back from your religion.' He refused to do so and he was handed over to a group of his courtiers. And he said to them: 'Take him to such and such mountain; make him climb up that mountain and when you reach its top (ask him to renounce his faith) but if he

refuses to do so, then throw him (down the mountain). So they took him and made him climb up the mountain and he said: 'O Allah, save me from them (in any way) You wish and the mountain began to quake and they all fell down and the boy came walking to the king.

The king said to him: 'What has happened to my soldiers?' He said: 'Allah has saved me from them.' He again handed him to some of his courtiers and said: 'Take him and carry him in a small boat and when you reach the middle of the ocean (ask him to renounce) his religion, but if he does not renounce his religion throw him (into the water).' So they took him and he said: 'O Allah, save me from them and what they want to do to me.' It was quite soon that the boat turned over and they were all drowned and he came walking to the king, and the king said to him: 'What has happened to my men?' He said: 'Allah has saved me from them.' So he said to the king: 'You cannot kill me until you do what I ask you to do.' And he said: 'What is that?' He said: 'You should gather all the people of your kingdom in a plain and hang me by the trunk (of a tree). Then take hold of an arrow from the quiver and say: In the name of Allah, the Lord of the worlds; then shoot an arrow and if you do that then you would be able to kill me.'

So the king called the people in an open plain and tied him (the boy) to the trunk of a tree, then he took hold of an arrow from his quiver and then placed the arrow in the bow and then said: 'In the name of Allah, the Lord of the young boy; he then shot an arrow and it bit his temple. The boy placed his hand on the temple where the arrow had bit him and he died. The people seeing this said: 'We believe in the Lord of this young man! We believe in the Lord of this young man! We believe in the Lord of this young man!'

The courtiers came to the king and it was said to him: 'Do you see that Allah has actually done what you aimed at stopping? The people have now believed in Allah. The king became furious and demanded that ditches be dug at important points on the path. When these ditches were dug, and the fire was lit in them, it was said (to the people): 'He who would not turn back from this boy's religion would be thrown in the fire or it would be said to them to jump in that. (The people accepted death but did not renounce religion) till a woman came with her child and she felt hesitant in jumping into the fire. So she waited at edge of the ditch looking at the child and looking at the fire. So Allah caused that child to speak and the child said to her: 'O my mother, endure (this ordeal) for it is the Truth.' (Muslim, Ahmad, Tirmizi, and Nasa'i)