

Tafseer Al-Baqarah [2: 243-245]

From the Book, Introduction to the Tafseer of the Quran,

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﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَا مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ لَهُمْ ابْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَأَبْنَائِنَا فَلَمَّا كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِنْهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ (246). وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ (247) وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَى وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحْمِلُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (248)﴾

“Have you not thought about the chiefs of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Musa When they said to a Prophet of theirs, “Appoint for us a king and we will fight in Allah’s way.” He said, “Would you then refrain from fighting, if fighting was prescribed for you” They said, “Why should we not fight in Allah’s way while we have been driven out of our homes and our children (families have been taken as captives)” But when fighting was ordered for them, they turned away, all except a few of them. And Allah is All-Aware of the wrongdoers. (246) And their Prophet said to them, “Indeed Allah has appointed Talut (Saul) as a king over you.” They said, “How can he be a king over us when we are fitter than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth.” He said, “Verily, Allah has chosen him above you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures’ needs, All-Knower.” (247) And their Prophet said to them, “Verily! The sign of His kingdom is that there shall come to you At-Tabut, wherein is Sakinah (peace and reassurance) from your Lord and a remnant of that which Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) left behind, carried by the angels. Verily, in this is a sign for you if you are indeed believers. (248)” [TMQ Surah Al-Baqarah 2:246-248]

In these verses, Allah (swt) explains:

1. Allah (swt) presents another example, related to fighting in the way of Allah (swt). In the previous verse, the example was about a people who left their homes, to escape meeting their enemy, in order to preserve their lives. When they reached a place they thought was safe, they camped in it. Then death came to them from where they did not expect. In that is a lesson for the fighter in the way of Allah (swt), so he does not fear meeting the enemy. This is because his lifespan term is in the hands of Allah (swt). The lifespan is neither prolonged nor cut short, by abstaining from fighting, or fleeing. The believer's motivation in the fight is strong. It exceeds what his enemy has. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا فِي ابْتِغَاءِ الْقَوْمِ إِنْ تَكُونُوا تَأْلَمُونَ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَأْلَمُونَ كَمَا تَأْلَمُونَ وَتَرْجُونَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَرْجُونَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا﴾ **“And don’t be weak in the pursuit of the enemy; if you are suffering (hardships) then surely they (too) are suffering (hardships) as you are suffering, but you have a hope from Allah (for the reward, i.e. Paradise) that for which they hope not; and Allah is Ever All-Knowing, All-Wise.” [TMQ Surah An-Nisaa 4:104].**

In this verse, Allah (swt) mentions to His Messenger (saw), and the believers, the story of the people of Musa (as) after his death, when they were commanded to fight. Then their Prophet said to them that perhaps you will not fight, if an angel were sent to you, and fighting was obliged upon you. It as if their Prophet was expecting that they would not abide by the command to fight, such was their state. However, they answered, confirming their

compliance. They reasoned that by the fact that their homes had been occupied, and they were expelled from them. They were removed from their wives and children. All that made them serious about fighting in the way of Allah (swt). So, if Allah (swt) sent them an angel, and fighting was obliged on them, they would fight. However, when fighting was prescribed, they went back, returning to their first stance. Only a few of them complied. Most were among the wrongdoers, through their disobedience to Allah's command.

There is nothing in the verse to indicate that these people, are those mentioned, in the previous verse.

2. The evidence for that is what Allah (swt) mentioned in the following verse. When their Prophet (as) told them that Allah (swt) had sent them Taalut (Saul) as a king, they came back saying that they have more right to kingship than him, and that he is not rich. Their Prophet (as) told them that Allah (swt) chose him for this task. He (swt) provided him with qualities for the task, with strength in both knowledge and body. However, they were not convinced.

3. Instead, they asked for a sign of the validity of his being a king over them. Their Prophet (saw) told them that the sign on that is that Allah (swt) will return to you the great "Ark of the Covenant." You had it previously, but it became lost to you. It will return to you with everything within it, of the artefacts of Allah's Messengers Musa (as) and Haaron (as). The angels will bring it, with the permission of their Lord.

Thus, when they were held over what they were asking for, and the path for searching for excuses was blocked, they responded to their Prophet, and marched with their king to fight in the way of Allah (swt).

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ﴾ **"Did you not see"** is as has been mentioned previously.

﴿الْمَلَأَ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ﴾ **"The chiefs of Banu Israa'eel."** Their influential and nobles. It is a name for the group as a whole, not for an individual within them. It was used in the Arabic language to denote the nobles and influential of the people, because their prestige fills تملأ the normal breasts, more so than the general public.

﴿مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى﴾ **"After Musa (as)"** means after the death of Musa (as).

﴿ابْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ﴾ **"Appoint for us a king and we will fight in Allah's way."**

The answer to the request is definite. It indicates their confirmation of fighting, when a king is sent to them.

﴿قَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا﴾ **He said, "Would you then refrain from fighting, if fighting was prescribed for you."** That is, you may not fight, when fighting is prescribed for you. There is an indication that their Prophet (as) was expecting them not to comply, and not to fight.

﴿أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَأَبْنَانَا﴾ **"we have been driven out of our homes and our children (families have been taken as captives)."** That is, we were expelled from our homes. We were also prevented from seeing our families and children, who were unable to leave.

﴿طَالُوتُ﴾ **"Talut (Saul)."** It is a non-Arabic ('ajami) name that it is Arabised. It does not undergo complete Arabic declension, because it is non-Arabic in origin.

Allah (swt) said, ﴿قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ﴾ **"They said, "How can he be a king over us when we are fitter than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth.""** They denounced him as a king over them. They inferred this because he is neither from a ruling dynasty, nor rich. Allah (swt) answered them, with the most eloquent answer:

First: He is the one whom Allah (swt) has chosen over you.

Second: Allah (swt) has increased his knowledge to enable him to govern your affairs.

Third: He has a strong body, so he is qualified to fight your enemy fiercely, and lead you with wisdom and strength.

First and foremost, this matter is with Allah (swt) alone. He determines it, however He wills. He is the One who bestows authority on whomever He wills.

Allah (swt) said, ﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾
“He said, “Verily, Allah has chosen him above you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower.”

Here, two points are noted:

a. Indeed, Allah (swt) did not mention in the qualities of the king the wealth that they mentioned. It is a secondary matter. It is not a priority is not in the qualities for ruling. Instead, the sufficiency results from what is entrusted to him of the task, even if he were poor. It takes precedence, such that the one who is wealthy alone, is not qualified for the task.

b. Allah (swt) gave precedence to knowledge, over the body, because of its importance in leading to the brink of victory and salvation. Allah (swt) said, ﴿أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحْمِلُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ﴾
“Verily! The sign of His kingdom is that there shall come to you At-Tabut, wherein is Sakinah (peace and reassurance) from your Lord, and a remnant of that which Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) left behind, carried by the angels.”

There are no authentic texts from the Book of Allah (swt) and the Sunnah of His Messenger (saw) about this Ark of the Covenant, which is understood from the context of the verse and the language within it. As for ﴿التَّابُوتُ﴾ **“At-Taabout (Ark of the Covenant),”** It is a great chest that they had. Its presence gave them peace in their souls, so they did not fear their enemy when fighting. The remaining artefacts from Musa (as) and Haaron (as) are kept in this chest.

This chest was missing. Thus, Allah (swt) made its return to them evidence of the validity of Taloot, as a king sent by Allah (swt) to them.

The sign of Allah (swt) was thus completed. The angels brought the Taabut to them. They believed and verified that Taloot was the rightful king over them. They proceeded with him to fight their enemy.

The verses did not clarify how the angels brought the trunk. Nor did the Messenger of Allah (saw) clarify. It was neither clarified as to how they carried it and transported it, nor was it clarified from where. So we stop at what was mentioned in the texts. We do not go beyond them to unsubstantiated narrations, in such cases.

The word Taalub, for chest, comes from the word “At-Tawb” which means to return. The chest has returned back to it, what comes out of it. Its owner returns to it for what he needs, from what was deposited within it. Its phonetic formation (wazn) is within the فعلوت fa'loot structure, whilst its origin is توبوت tawbut. So the و transforms the ف position, to make vivid (tahrūk) and open (infitaah), what comes before it.

Taabut تابوت is in the language of the Quraish. It is the language in which the Qur'an was written, at the hands of the Messenger of Allah (saw). The Ansar pronounce it as تابوه Tabuh. It is the word that Zaid bin Thabit (ra) asked 'Uthman bin Affan (ra) about, regarding permissibility of writing it in the Mushaf with al-Ha هـ. 'Uthman informed him (ra) to keep the writing it as it is, so it is written in the Quranic pages in the Quraish language. Its wazan (phonetic formation) is according to the language of the Ansar, as al-Zamakhshari said, fa'oul, and he says, إن (فاعولا) قليل الاستعمال، والأشهر لغة قريش على وزن فعلوت من التوب وهو الرجوع
“The faa'oul فاعولا form is used little. The most famous language of the Quraysh is based on the wazan of fa'loot فعلوت, from the root at-Tawb التوب and it means ‘to return.’”