

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: Art thou not aware of those elders of the children of Israel, after the time of Moses, how they said unto a prophet of theirs,²³⁵ "Raise up a king for us, [and] we shall fight in God's cause"? Said he: "Would you, perchance, refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?" They answered: "And why should we not fight in God's cause when we and our children have been driven from our homelands?"²³⁶ Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they did turn back, save for a few of them; but God had full knowledge of the evildoers.

Malik: Have you not reflected on what the leaders of the children of Israel demanded from one of their Prophets after the death of Musa (Moses)? "Appoint for us a king," they said, "and we will fight in the cause of Allah." The Prophet replied: "What if you refuse to fight when you are ordered to do so?" They replied, "How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah, while we along with our children were driven out of our homes?" But when, on their demand, they were ordered to fight, all refused except a few of them. Allah knows the evildoers.

Mustafa Khattab:

Have you not seen those chiefs of the Children of Israel after Moses? They said to one of their prophets, "Appoint for us a king, and we will fight in the cause of Allah." He said, "Are you not going to cower if ordered to fight?" They replied, "How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah, while we were driven out of our homes and separated from our children?" But when they were ordered to fight, they fled, except for a few of them. And Allah has perfect knowledge of the wrongdoers.

Pickthall: Bethink thee of the leaders of the Children of Israel after Moses, how they said unto a Prophet whom they had: Set up for us a King and we will fight in Allah's way. He said: Would ye then refrain from fighting if fighting were prescribed for you? They said: Why should we not fight in Allah's way when we have been driven from our dwellings with our children? Yet, when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, all save a few of them. Allah is Aware of evil-doers.

Yusuf Ali: Hast thou not turned thy vision to the chiefs of the children of Israel after (the time of) Moses? They said to a Prophet (that was) among them: "Appoint for us a king that we may fight in the cause of Allah." He said: "Is it not possible if ye were commanded to fight that ye will not fight?" They said: "How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?" But when they were commanded to fight they turned back except a small band among them. But Allah has full knowledge of those who do wrong. ^{277 278 279}

Transliteration: Alam tara ila almalai min banee israeela min baAAadi moosa ith qaloo linabiyyin lahumu ibAAath lana malikan nuqatil fee sabeeli Allahi qala hal AAasaytum in kutiba AAalaykumu alqitalu alla tuqatiloo qaloo wama lana alla nuqatila fee sabeeli Allahi waqad okhrijna min diyarina waabnaina falamma kutiba AAalayhimu alqitalu tawallaw illa qaleelan minhum waAllahu AAaleemun bialththalimeena

Author Comments

236 - Obviously a reference to the many invasions of their homelands by their perennial enemies, the Philistines, Amorites, Amalekites and other Semitic and non-Semitic tribes living in and around Palestine; and, by implication, a reminder to believers of all times that "fighting in God's cause" (as defined in the Qur'an) is an act of faith.

277 - The next generation after Moses and Aaron was ruled by Joshua, who crossed the Jordan and settled the tribes in Palestine. His rule lasted for 25 years, after which there was a period of 320 years when the Israelites had a chequered history. They were not united among themselves, and suffered many reverses at the hands of the Midianites, Amalekites and other tribes of Palestine. They frequently lapsed into idolatry and deserted the worship of the true God. From time to time a leader appeared among them who assumed dictatorial powers. Acting under a sort of theocratic commission from God, he pointed out their backsliding, re-united them under His banner, and restored, from time to time and place to place, the power of Israel. These dictators are called Judges in the English translation of the Old Testament. The last of their line was Samuel, who marks the transition towards the line of Kings on the one hand and of the later Prophets on the other. He may be dated approximately about the 11th century B.C.

278 - This was Samuel. In his time Israel had suffered from much corruption within and many reverses without. The Philistines had made a great attack and defeated Israel with great slaughter. The Israelites, instead of relying on Faith and their own valour and cohesion, brought out their most sacred possession, the Ark of the Covenant, to help them in the fight. But the enemy captured it, carried it away, and retained it for seven months. The Israelites forgot that wickedness cannot screen itself behind a sacred relic. Nor can a sacred relic help the enemies of faith. The enemy found that the Ark brought nothing but misfortune for themselves, and were glad to abandon it. It apparently remained twenty years in the village (qarya) of Yaarim (Kirjath-jeafim): I. Samuel, vii. 2. Meanwhile the people pressed Samuel to appoint them a king. They thought that a king would cure all their ills, whereas what was wanting was a spirit of union and discipline and a readiness on their part to fight in the cause of God.

279 - Samuel knew as a Prophet that the people were fickle and only wanted to cover their own want of union and true spirit by asking for a king. They replied with spirit in words, but when it came to action, they failed. They hid themselves in caves and rocks, or ran away, and even those who remained "followed him trembling": I. Samuel, xiii 6-7.

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