23354 - Why is it permissible to take pictures of trees and rocks even though they are the creation of Allaah?

the question

I am wondering why it is possible to take pictures of buildings and other things, which are not moving. As Allah (SWT) says: 'Who does more wrong than the one, who tries to create something like my creation? Let him create a grain of wheat or a kernel of corn'. Why Allah gives an example of unmoving things? Why not birds, or people? I'm afraid may be it means that we can not even take a picture of unanimated things also?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

and blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah.

The majority of scholars say that it is permissible to make pictures of inanimate objects such as trees, buildings, etc, and they quote several texts as evidence for that, including the following:

The report narrated by al-Bukhari (5963) and Muslim (2110) from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say, ‘Whoever makes an image in this world will be told to breathe life into it in the Day of Resurrection, and he will not be able to do so.’” The prohibition mentioned in this hadeeth has to do with animate objects. What confirms this interpretation is that Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him), who was the narrator of this hadeeth, issued a fatwa permitting the drawing of trees and inanimate objects, as was narrated in Saheeh al-Bukhari (2225) and Saheeh Muslim (2110) from Sa’eed ibn Abi’l-Hasan, who said: “I was with Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) when a man came to him and said, ‘O Ibn ‘Abbaas, I am a man who earns a living by the work of my hands, and I make these pictures (or images).’ Ibn ‘Abbaas said: ‘I will only tell you what I

heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say, and I heard him say, “Whoever makes an image in this world will be punished until he breathes life into it, and he will never be able to do so.’’ The man became very upset and his face turned pale. He – meaning Ibn ‘Abbaas – said, ‘Woe to you! If you insist on making them (images), then you can make images of these trees and everything that does not have a soul.’”

In Saheeh al-Bukhari (5181) and Saheeh Muslim (2108) it is narrated that ‘Aa’ishah, the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘The makers of these images will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it will be said to them: ‘Bring to life that which you have created!’” and he said that the angels will not enter a house in which there are images.

This hadeeth indicates that the punishment has to do with images of animate beings, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that they will be told, “Bring to life that which you have created!”

With regard to the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Let them create a grain of wheat or a grain of barley,” what is meant by that is to show that they are incapable of doing so, because no matter what humans make that may resemble these grains or plants in shape, they can never instill in them the characteristics of these plants, so they cannot be planted and will never grow, and so on. If humans are unable to create a single grain with some of the characteristics that Allah has created in it, then they are incapable of breathing life into the images and statues that they make. Hence it becomes clear that what is meant by the hadeeth is not that which may first spring to mind, that making images of grains and trees and inanimate objects is haraam, rather what is meant is to show that man is incapable as we have mentioned above. And Allah knows best.