



Ethics of the Demand for Power of Prophet Sulaiman and Prophet Yusuf in Tafsir Fi Zhilal Al-Qur'an

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Article Information:

Received July 07, 2026

Revised July 24, 2026

Accepted August 05, 2026

Keywords: *Ethics of the Demand for Power, Islamic Leadership, Prophet Sulaiman, Prophet Yusuf, Sayyid Qutb*

Abstract

Power in Islam is a divine mandate with ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions. However, the abuse of power in contemporary life demonstrates a shift in its meaning into an instrument of personal and group interests. Previous studies generally discussed the leadership of Prophet Sulaiman and Prophet Yusuf separately, resulting in a comparative examination of the ethical basis for their demands for power. This study aims to analyze the ethics of demands for power in the Qur'an through a comparison of the verses. QS. Şād [38]:35 and QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 based on the interpretation of Sayyid Qutb in *Tafsir Fi Zhilal Al-Qur'an*. The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method and a library research type. Primary data comes from *Tafsir Fi Zhilal Al-Qur'an*, while secondary data were obtained from relevant books and scientific articles. The data were analyzed using content analysis and comparative methods. The results of the study indicate two complementary ethical models of power demands: the transcendental-worship model in the story of the Prophet Sulaiman and the competence-benefit model in the story of the Prophet Yusuf. A comparison of the two yields four main principles: monotheistic orientation, moral integrity, competence supported by a track record, and commitment to the public good. Thus, a demand for power gains ethical legitimacy when based on devotion to God, accountable capabilities, and an orientation toward the public interest.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for power in modern life is increasingly complex because positions are not always understood as a mandate but are often used as a means to fulfill personal and group interests. Competition for power can be accompanied by abuse of authority, patronage, nepotism, and corruption, which degrade the quality of governance and increase social injustice (Chanifah et al., 2024; Khoirin & Junaedi, 2022; Kurniawan, 2025). In the Indonesian context, this tendency is also linked to the weakening of democracy and the dominance of political elites (Mietzner, 2024).

How to cite:

Halomoan, P. J., & Ardianti, S. (2026). Ethics of the Demand for Power of Prophet Sulaiman and Prophet Yusuf in Tafsir Fi Zhilal Al-Qur'an. *Suluh Pasaman*, 4(2), 628-637.

E-ISSN:

2986-8467

Published by:

The Institute for Research and Community Service

The issue of power becomes more complicated when religious texts are selectively interpreted to justify particular political interests. This practice contradicts the principles of Islamic leadership, which emphasize trustworthiness, justice, responsibility, and the common good as the basis for the exercise of power (Fauziah, 2025). Position is not merely a formal position, but a moral responsibility that must be accounted for before God and society. Therefore, requests for power must be assessed based on the underlying motives, competence, goals, and common good.

The hadith prohibits granting a position to someone who requests it, as such a request could be motivated by personal ambition (Khairudin & Nasrullah, 2022). However, the Qur'an presents two stories that, at first glance, suggest different circumstances. Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) offered himself to manage Egypt's treasury, stating his ability to safeguard and possess knowledge, as stated in Surah Yusuf [12]:55. Meanwhile, Prophet Sulaiman (peace be upon him) asked Allah to grant him a kingdom that would not be granted to anyone after him, as mentioned in Surah Yusuf [12]:35.

Both stories demonstrate that a demand for power cannot be judged solely on the act of seeking office. The context, motives, competencies, goals, and responsibilities behind it must also be considered. Yusuf's request concerned the ability to manage resources during a time of crisis, while Sulaiman's request concerned devotion to God and the fulfillment of his prophetic mission. This difference raises the question of the ethical boundary between a demand for power as a personal ambition and a demand for power as a form of fulfilling a mandate.

Previous research has discussed leadership character education through prophetic methods, political ethics based on trust and justice, and the importance of deliberation in the exercise of power (Adnan & Usman, 2022; Hakiki et al., 2025; Zakiyamani et al., 2026). Other studies emphasize that identity politics needs to be controlled through the principles of monotheism and *shari'ah* as not to strengthen the egoism of the group (Kurniadi et al., 2025). In the story of Prophet Yusuf, the nature of *shari'ah* is understood as the foundation of integrity and competence, while his life journey demonstrates the process of developing spiritual maturity before assuming public office (Budiyanto et al., 2021; Hakim et al., 2024). Integrating Qur'anic values with modern professional issues can also create a more holistic approach by connecting moral, spiritual, and social dimensions (Saputri et al., 2026).

However, previous research has focused more on general Islamic leadership principles, the prohibition on seeking positions, or the leadership of the Prophet Yusuf (as) separately. Studies specifically comparing the ethical foundations, motives, orientations, and goals of the Prophet Sulaiman's and Yusuf's requests for power are limited. Few studies have explained how these two requests can be understood simultaneously without contrasting the prohibition on seeking power with the permission to offer competence for the benefit of society. This study uses the Tafsir *Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an* karya Sayyid Quṭb as the main reference. The selection and interpretation of *Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an* in this study is based on the pattern *adabi ijtima'i* and approach *halakohi*. The distinctive characteristic of this interpretation is its tendency to position verses as sources of ethical and socio-political principles, rather than merely historical narratives or normative-jurisprudential studies. This characteristic makes it more relevant for exploring the ethical dimensions and moral responsibility behind the story of the Prophet Sulaiman and Prophet Yusuf's request for power than interpretations that are solely linguistic or jurisprudential.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze and compare the ethics of Prophet Sulaiman's request for power in QS. Ṣād [38]:35 and Prophet Yusuf in QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 based on the interpretation of Sayyid Quṭb in *Interpretation of Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an*. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of two ethical models for the demand for power: the transcendental-worship model and the competence-

benefit model. The results are expected to provide a more contextual framework for understanding the legitimacy of the demand for power and serve as a basis for developing Islamic leadership education oriented toward monotheism, integrity, competence, and the public interest.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research design and descriptive-analytical methods. The material object of the research is QS. Şād [38]:35 and QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 along with their interpretations in *Interpretation of FiZilāl al-Qur'ān*, while the formal object is the ethics of requesting power. These two verses were chosen because they both contain requests for power, but they have different subjects, forms of request, contexts, and objectives. These differences are analyzed comparatively to identify the ethical basis, motives, orientations, and goals of the Prophet Sulaiman's and Prophet Yusuf's requests for power. This study did not involve participants or respondents because all data was in written documents.

The research data consists of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Qur'an and *Interpretation of FiZilāl al-Qur'ān* works of Sayyid Quṭb, especially the interpretation of QS. Şād [38]:35 and QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 (Qutb, 2003). Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and previous research that discuss the thoughts of Sayyid Quṭb, Islamic political ethics, leadership, power, and the stories of the Prophets Sulaiman and Yusuf. The selection of secondary sources was based on their suitability to the research focus, the credibility of the publisher or journal, the completeness of the bibliographic information, and their direct relevance to the two verses being analyzed. Data were collected through documentation techniques, including the stages of searching, selecting, recording, grouping, and reviewing sources based on the research theme.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis and comparative methods. Content analysis was used to identify the meaning, context, and ethical categories contained in Sayyid Quṭb's interpretation (Krippendorff, 2019). The analysis stage begins with a comprehensive reading of the interpretation of both verses, identifying the context of the verses and the main ideas, grouping the data based on the categories of source of legitimacy, motive of request, competence, purpose of power, and orientation of benefit, then comparing the similarities and differences. The results of the comparison are then synthesized to formulate a transcendental-worship model in the story of the Prophet Sulaiman and a competence-benefit model in the story of the Prophet Yusuf. The validity of the interpretation is examined by examining the consistency between the interpretations of Sayyid Quṭb, the context of the verse, and secondary literature that discusses related themes, as well as checking the consistency between the data, the analysis process, and the research conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sayyid Qu's Thought Framework on the Authority of Power and Characteristics of Tafsir FiZilāl al-Qur'ān

Sayyid Qu's political thought is based on the concept of *science*, namely the belief that supreme sovereignty in regulating human life comes from God. Within this framework, law, government, and social order must not be separated from divine values. Power that ignores God's sovereignty is seen as a form of oppression. *Jabilyah* is modern because humans place their own will above divine guidance (Bara, 2026). This view leads to power not being understood as a private right or the ultimate goal of struggle, but as a trust that must be accounted for before God.

Power as a trust is also related to the limits of the community's obedience to the leader. Loyalty to the leader can only be justified if his leadership is based on

faith, piety, and an orientation towards benefit. The relationship between the leader and the community is thus not just a formal political contract, but a moral bond that demands responsibility from both parties (Roni & Anzaikhan, 2022). Based on this framework, the demand for a position only gains legitimacy when directed to carry out the trust and uphold divine values, not to fulfill personal ambitions.

This framework influences the pattern of interpretation in the *Interpretation of FiZilal al-Qur'an*. This work was born in the socio-political context of mid-20th-century Egypt, marked by modernization, the development of secular thought, and tensions between Islamic movements and the government regime. This interpretation not only explains the content of the verses but also presents the Quran as a guide to addressing the social and political issues facing Muslims (Firdaus & Zulaiha, 2022). Therefore, the verses on power are not treated as mere historical narratives, but as sources of ethical principles for building community life.

From a methodological perspective, *the interpretation of FiZilal al-Qur'an* using reasoning *bi al-ra'yi* which remains based on linguistic rules and sharia principles. The presentation uses the method *facing h. league* by explaining the verses based on the order of the manuscript, the relationship between verses, the theme of the surah, the context in which the verse was revealed, and relevant hadiths (Firdaus & Zulaiha, 2022). This method is combined with a style *adabi ijtimā'ī* and approach *h. al-cobol* which connects the beauty of the language of the Qur'an with the need for social change (Lestari & Vera, 2021).

Attention to the interrelationships between verses is also an important characteristic of this interpretation. A single verse is not understood in isolation, but placed within a series of verses and the main theme of the surah (Indayanti, 2022). This framework is relevant for reading QS. Šād [38]:35 in relation to the trials, repentance, and gifts to Prophet Sulaiman. The same framework is used to understand QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 as part of the long journey of Prophet Yusuf, which includes trials, proof of integrity, trust, and responsibility in facing crises.

Interpretation of Prophet Sulaiman's Request for Power in QS. Šād [38]:35

Prophet Sulaiman's request for power is found in QS. Džad [38]:35:

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لِأَحَدٍ مِّنْ بَعْدِي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

It means: *He said, "O my Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom that no one after me will have. Indeed, You are the Bestower."* QS. Šād [38]:35).

This verse is in the series of stories of the prophets found in Surah QS. Šād. The stories of Prophets David, Sulaiman, Ayyub, Ibrahim, Ismail, and Idris show the relationship of the prophets with Allah through steadfastness, repentance, humility, and trust. QS. Šād [38]:35 thus does not stand alone, but is related to the trials experienced by Prophet Sulaiman and his attitude after receiving the kingdom from Prophet David (Amrulloh & Ikhwan, 2021). Instead of making power a source of pride, Prophet Sulaiman returned all sources of authority to Allah.

The structure of the prayer shows the relationship between spiritual awareness and the request for power. *Rabb* shows the recognition that Allah is the God who preserves, directs, and is the source of all authority (Nas, 2021). *ighfir li* is placed before the request for kingship. This arrangement suggests that an awareness of moral limitations precedes the desire for power. Power is thus not sought out of a sense of self-worth, but out of humility and need for God's forgiveness.

Say *hab li* shows that kingship is understood as a gift, not an independent achievement. Meanwhile, the word *property* not only refers to political position, but also the authority to manage resources and carry out government responsibilities. *day yanbaghi li-ah* *I am a bad person*. shows the specificity of the kingdom of Prophet Sulaiman as part of his prophetic miracle. The request is not solely directed to

establish personal superiority, but is related to the prophetic capacity and task given to him by God (Ghani, 2023).

Closing the prayer with the expression *innaka anta al-wahhāb* affirms that God is the only source of all gifts. This expression places the entire request within a framework *pointhid af'ali*, namely the awareness that human abilities and power stem from God's will. Therefore, the kingdom requested by Prophet Sulaiman cannot be separated from devotion and accountability to Him.

Interpretations of this verse place Sulaiman's prayer as part of a series of trials and blessings. The prayer's structure, which begins with a request for forgiveness, indicates that Sulaiman first returned to God before requesting the kingdom. This power is seen as a gift entirely within God's will, not merely the result of human ability. The request for the kingdom was also not based on *atsarah*, namely the desire to prioritize one's own interests and privileges. This kingdom has a special character as a miracle that supports the implementation of the prophetic message (Qutb, 2003).

The following verses explain how this prayer was answered. God subjected the winds to Sulaiman, gave him the ability to control the devils who worked on building and diving, and granted him authority over those who rebelled. All of these powers were used to support the prophetic mission and were exercised within the limits set by God. The size of his kingdom did not change Sulaiman's position as a devout servant, but rather became part of God's glorification of a prophet who was able to carry out his mandate (Qutb, 2003).

These findings yield a transcendental-worship model in the ethics of requests for power. In this model, requests for power gain legitimacy because they are initiated by spiritual awareness, directed toward God, and used to fulfill the prophetic mandate. Power is understood as a gift that must be exercised as a form of worship, not as a personal right that can be used without accountability.

Interpretation of Prophet Yusuf's Request for Power in QS. Yūsuf [12]:55

The request for the position of Prophet Yusuf is found in QS. Yūsuf [12]:55:

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ

It means: "He (Yusuf) said, 'Make me the treasurer of the land (of Egypt). Indeed, I am a man who is good at keeping (trusts) and very knowledgeable.'" (QS. Yūsuf [12]:55).

Unlike Sulaiman, who submitted his request directly to God, Yusuf presented himself to the King of Egypt. This request came after Yusuf underwent a long series of trials, including being thrown into a well, sold into slavery, slander, imprisonment, and finally successfully interpreting the king's dream. This series of events shaped his character, spiritual maturity, and leadership capacity.

The request for the position was also made after Prophet Yusuf's name had been cleared and the king recognized his integrity. Therefore, his nomination was not the act of someone without experience or a track record. The request arose when Egypt was facing a food crisis and needed someone capable of managing agricultural produce, food storage, and distribution. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf's request was a response to the needs of the community, not a drive to gain position for personal gain (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Pulungan et al., 2022).

Say *in the garden* indicates a request to be given a specific mandate, not a demand to obtain all the power of government. The request is specifically directed at *khazā'ini al-ard*, namely the management of the state treasury related to the storage of agricultural products and logistics distribution. The specificity of the requested field indicates that Prophet Yusuf applied for a position that suited his abilities and the needs of the state (Munandar & Sidqy, 2025).

Expression *ḥsna* and *‘alim* contains two main qualifications. Nature *ḥsna* demonstrate the ability to maintain trust, integrity, thoroughness, and the ability not to abuse trust. *scholar* Demonstrate professional knowledge, skills, and abilities. The juxtaposition of these two traits emphasizes that moral integrity is inseparable from technical competence. Leaders must not only possess good intentions but also be able to carry out their mandate effectively (Ar & Rahmatullah, 2022).

The interpretation of QS. Yusuf [12]:55 cannot be separated from the king's statement in the previous verse that the Prophet Yusuf held a high position and could be trusted. This trust was given after his clean name, breadth of knowledge, and wisdom were proven. The position he received was not the result of patronage or personal closeness to the ruler, but rather the fruit of integrity and a track record that had been tested (Qutb, 2003).

Prophet Yusuf's attitude after receiving respect also shows strong self-esteem. He did not lower his dignity to get the king's attention and did not give excessive praise to the ruler. Three values that stand out from this attitude are *al-karāmah* or glory, *al-ibā’* or self-esteem, and *al-i’tizāz* or self-respect. These three values distinguish the Prophet Yusuf's request from opportunistic behavior that uses closeness to those in power as a path to gaining office (Qutb, 2003).

Prophet Yusuf's request was also made at the right time, after the king's trust had been established and the need for crisis management had become clear. This mandate required the ability to store supplies, manage agricultural produce, plan distribution, and meet the needs of the community during times of famine. Mentioning the nature of *ḥsna* and *scholar* because it is not a form of self-pride, but an explanation of the qualifications needed to carry out the task (Sholiha, 2024).

The prohibition against seeking office and self-praise cannot be understood without considering the context. The Prophet Yusuf lived in a society that had not yet implemented the Islamic system and saw a space for governing while simultaneously conveying the values of monotheism (Humaira & Pasaribu, 2022). This request is not only related to administrative skills, but also to the availability of space to carry out the mandate and mission of da'wah in Egyptian society (Qutb, 2003).

These findings yielded a competency-benefit model. This model also aligns with Islamic leadership principles, which emphasize competence and track record as prerequisites for leadership eligibility, as discussed in the study of Islamic political ethics based on trust and justice (Fauziah, 2025). In this model, a request for office is justified if based on integrity, professional ability, a verifiable track record, real community needs, and a commitment to resolving public issues. Legitimacy does not stem from a desire for power, but from the alignment between a person's capacity and the mandate they are expected to fulfill.

A Comparative Analysis of the Ethics of Demand for Power and Its Relevance to Modern Life

QS comparison results. Doā [38]:35 and QS. Yūsuf [12]:55 show that the Qur'an does not place the request for power as an absolutely forbidden act. The legitimacy of the request for power is determined by the source, orientation, motive, capacity, context, and purpose of its use. Both stories present different, but complementary, models of prophetic leadership.

Table 1. Comparison of the Ethics of the Prophet Sulaiman's and Yusuf's Requests for Power

Aspect	Prophet Sulaiman	Prophet Yusuf
Request form	Prayer to God	Submission to the King of Egypt
The power requested	A kingdom with prophetic specificity	State treasury management
Context	Trials, repentance, and God's grace	The threat of food crisis and the country's needs
Basis of legitimacy	Devotion, humility, and prophetic trust	Integrity, competence, and track record
Orientation	Monotheism and the implementation of the message	Welfare and crisis resolution
Main characters	Spiritual awareness and dependence on God	Hsnakezand 'alim
Ethical model	Transcendental worship	Competence-benefit
Risks avoided	Personal pride and superiority	Ambition, patronage, and opportunism

The main similarity between the two stories lies in their orientation. Prophet Sulaiman and Prophet Yusuf did not ask for power to gain personal glory. Prophet Sulaiman's request was directed at fulfilling the prophetic mandate, while Prophet Yusuf's request was directed at protecting society from crisis. Both stories also place moral quality as a prerequisite for assuming power. Prophet Sulaiman's humility and Prophet Yusuf's integrity demonstrate that leadership must be preceded by character development.

The differences between the two lie in the form, recipient, scope, and basis of the request. Prophet Sulaiman prayed to Allah for a kingdom of extraordinary character. Prophet Yusuf volunteered to the king to manage a specific field suited to his expertise. This distinction demonstrates that the Quran does not prescribe a single pattern for acquiring power. Requests can occur in the spiritual realm as well as through social and governmental mechanisms, as long as they are constrained by moral values and responsibility.

Based on these results, this study formulates two ethical models for requesting power. The transcendental-worship model positions power as a gift from God to be used for devotion and the fulfillment of spiritual mandates. The competence-benefit model positions self-solicitation as a justifiable act if one possesses integrity, capability, a track record, and a commitment to the needs of society.

The synthesis of these two models yields four ethical principles for the demand for power. First, a monotheistic orientation, recognizing that the source and accountability of power are under the will of God. Second, moral integrity, reflected through honesty, responsibility, self-respect, and a willingness to avoid abuse of office. Third, competence, supported by a track record, allows a person's worthiness to be judged based on actual ability, not popularity or political affiliation. Fourth, a welfare orientation, which makes solving societal problems the primary goal of power.

These findings also help explain the relationship between the Quranic narrative and the hadith regarding the prohibition on asking for positions. This prohibition is more appropriately directed at requests driven by personal ambition, the desire for privilege, or the desire to dominate others. Requests based on moral responsibility, proven competence, and public need have a different character.

However, the right to apply is not unconditional. One must be able to demonstrate integrity, expertise, a track record, and a concrete problem to be solved.

In modern life, this principle is relevant to the recruitment process for leaders in government, bureaucracy, community organizations, and educational institutions. The suitability of prospective leaders cannot be measured solely on popularity, network strength, or ability to win contests. Assessment must also encompass integrity, competence, experience, responsibility, and programs oriented toward community needs. Integrating Quranic values with professional issues can produce a more comprehensive leadership framework by integrating moral, spiritual, and social dimensions (Saputri et al., 2026).

The implication for Islamic leadership education is the need for development that not only teaches organizational skills but also fosters a monotheistic orientation, self-esteem, honesty, professional competence, and concern for the public interest. The story of the Prophet Sulaiman provides a spiritual foundation that power is a gift and a trust, while the story of the Prophet Yusuf demonstrates the importance of competence and track record. The combination of the two can be used as a foundation for educating future leaders, ensuring that power is not treated as a personal goal but rather as a means to achieve justice and the welfare of society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the demand for power in the Qur'an is not absolutely forbidden, but rather is determined by motive, context, competence, and purpose. Sayyid Qur'an's interpretation produces two complementary models of transcendental worship in the Prophet Sulaiman (QS.Doāḍ [38]:35) and the competence-benefit of the Prophet Yusuf (QS. Yūsuf [12]:55), which together produce four principles: monotheistic orientation, moral integrity, competence with a track record, and commitment to the welfare of society.

The demand for power, whether from God or human authority, is justified if it is based on responsibility and the needs of society, not personal ambition, which is relevant for the selection and development of leaders in various fields. This study is limited to two verses and one interpretation; further research is recommended, comparing them with other commentators or examining the four principles in contemporary leadership practice.

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