

# Prophet Salih and the people of Thamūd

Prophet Salih (peace be upon him), like Prophet Hud, was of Arab descent. The Arabs had only four prophets: Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, and Muhammad — may Allah's peace and blessings be upon them all.

A remarkable aspect of Prophet Salih's story is that the remnants of his people's dwellings still exist today. Their city, known as "**Madain Salih**", is located in Al-Ula, in present-day Saudi Arabia. A simple search for "**Madain Salih**" reveals striking images of their ancient homes, skillfully carved into the mountains thousands of years ago.

Another intriguing aspect of the stories of Hud, Salih, and Shu'ayb is that they are mentioned multiple times in the Qur'an, across different chapters and contexts. However, they are absent from the Torah and the Gospel.

What sets Prophet Salih's story apart is that his people demanded a specific miracle from Allah, and He granted them exactly what they asked for—the she-camel. This contrasts with earlier prophets such as Noah and Hud (peace be upon them), who were not sent with such miracles. Many prophets and messengers who followed, however, were supported by divine miracles as proof of their truthfulness and a means to guide their people.

After the downfall of 'Ad, the tribe of Thamūd rose to inherit their mantle of power and prosperity in ancient Arabia. Like their

predecessors, they were blessed with abundant resources and magnificent capabilities. As the Qur'an records in 7:74: **"And remember how He made you successors after 'Ad and settled you in the land, wherein you build palaces from its plains and carve homes from the mountains."**

Despite witnessing the fate that had befallen 'Ad, the people of Thamūd followed a similar path of hubris. They carved elaborate dwellings into mountainsides and constructed grand edifices across the plains, showcasing their architectural prowess. Yet their material achievements masked a spiritual decline, as they turned away from divine guidance and embraced idol worship. Though they knew well the cautionary tale of 'Ad's destruction, their pride led them to disregard these warnings. The virtue and wisdom of their forebears faded from memory as powerful men ruled through oppression. Once marked by divine favor, they descended into widespread transgression and moral decay.

Allah the Almighty [Allah is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic, pronounced with emphatic L] chose from among the people of Thamūd a messenger - Prophet Salih (pbuh) [in Arabic Salih means virtuous]. Though the Qur'an does not detail Salih's lineage, as with many other Prophets, this emphasizes the universal significance of his message



Guest Column

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rather than his personal history. Among his people, Salih was renowned for his exceptional character, moral virtue, and faithful adherence to the righteous teachings of his forebears.

Upon receiving divine revelation, Salih began his prophetic mission with unwavering dedication. The core of his message was profound yet direct: **"O my people! Worship Allah, you have no other god but Him."** [Qur'an 11:61]. Salih called his people to pure monotheism - to worship Allah (SWT) (Subhānahu Wa Ta'ālā - Glorified and Exalted is He) alone, without associating any partners in His divinity. While a few of his community embraced this divine guidance and followed him, most rejected his message. These deniers not only refused to believe but also subjected their Prophet to both verbal and physical persecution, a poignant response as recorded in the Qur'an (11:62): **"O Saleh, we had high hopes in you before this. Are you trying to prevent us from worshiping what our forefathers worshiped? We are in serious doubt about what you are calling us to."** Salih's response, preserved in the Qur'an (11:63), revealed his spir-

itual conviction and deep concern for his people: **"O, my people! Consider if I stand on clear evidence from my Lord, and He has blessed me with mercy from Himself, who would protect me from Allah if I were to disobey Him? You add nothing for me except loss."** This exchange laid bare the fundamental conflict - while his people clung blindly to ancestral traditions without seeking proof or purpose, Salih stood firm on divine guidance and rational evidence.

As Salih continued his mission with unwavering determination, the tribal leaders grew increasingly concerned about his growing influence. They sought to challenge him, not from a genuine desire for truth, but as a strategy to discredit his message. They demanded a specific miracle - a unique she-camel should emerge from the mountains. This request would become a pivotal moment in their story, testing both the prophet's divine connection and his people's willingness to accept clear signs from their Creator.

In response to their challenge, Allah manifested a sign that would test the sincerity of Thamūd's demand. At their gathering place, Prophet Salih (pbuh) addressed his people, reminding them of Allah's boundless favors. The tribal leaders, pointing to a massive rock, issued their challenge: they demanded a specific miracle - a she-camel, ten months pregnant, of impressive stature and beauty, to

emerge from solid stone.

Salih sought their covenant: **"If Allah grants exactly what you have described, will you, then, believe in my message and accept that I am His messenger?"** When they agreed, he petitioned Allah with sincere supplication. In a display of divine power that would leave no room for doubt, the rock split asunder, and from it emerged precisely what they had requested - a magnificent she-camel, exactly as they had specified, ten months pregnant and of extraordinary appearance.

The miracle awestruck them, for here was an undeniable sign of Allah's power and Salih's prophethood. As the Qur'an records: **"We sent the she-camel to Thamūd as a clear sign, but they did her wrong (explained later)"** [17:59]. Despite witnessing this overwhelming evidence, the response of Thamūd reflected a tragic pattern seen throughout human history - while some embraced faith upon witnessing this miracle, many persisted in denial. Allah states: **"Verily the dwellers of Al-Hijr denied the Messengers. We gave them Our Signs, but they were averse to them (the name of Salih's city)"** [Qur'an 15:80-81].

This miraculous event served not only as a divine sign but also as a decisive moment that would reveal the true nature of those who had demanded it. Through it, the sincere seekers of truth were distinguished from those who

merely sought pretexts for their denial.

The she-camel was unique in its behavior. She used to drink all the water in their will every other day. It would produce enough milk in the day she drinks for all the people of Salih, yet the Qur'an did not mention this behavior.

The Qur'an summarizes this part of the story in these verses, **"Thamūd denied the messengers. When their brother Saleh said to them, 'Do you not fear? I am a sincere messenger to you. So fear Allah, and obey me. I ask of you no payment for this. My reward is only from the Lord of the Universe. Will you be left secure in what is here? In gardens and springs? And plantations, and palm trees with tender fruits? And you skillfully carve dwellings in the mountains? So reverence Allah, and obey me. And do not obey the command of the extravagant (in terms of money and moral decadence). Those who work corruption on earth, and do not reform.' They said, 'You are surely bewitched. You are nothing but a human like us. So bring a sign, if you are truthful. He said, 'This is a camel. She has her turn of drinking, and you have your turn of drinking—on a known day. And do not touch her with harm, lest you be seized by the punishment of a tremendous day.'"** [Quran 26: 141-156]  
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