

Prophet Salih, Part 2

The story of prophet Salih (peace be upon him) is unique because his people were the first to ask for a miracle from God.

People before them did not ask their messengers for miracles for they were a few thousand years later than people before them. They heard from their ancestors, generations after generations, about Adam, Seth, Noah (and the flood), and then Hūd (and the people 'Aad). Later generations have increased in number, spread over the earth, and almost forgotten about all the teachings their forefathers used to repeat. Yet, most importantly, Satan is still playing his games to fulfill his plot, **"Allah cursed him [the satan]. And he [Satan] said: 'I will take an appointed portion of your slaves'"** [Qur'an 4-118].

A miracle, by definition, must transcend natural laws. Interestingly, divine miracles often appear in domains where the recipient people excel, to prevent them from claiming they could replicate such feats through their expertise. This is illustrated in the story of Prophet Salih and the people of Thamūd. When they specifically requested a she-camel as proof, God granted their wish. The people of Thamūd, skilled Bedouin camel herders with deep knowledge of these animals, immediately recognized that this miraculous she-camel possessed qualities far beyond those of any ordinary camel they had

encountered. The miracle is not only the she-camel itself but in its defiance of their experience with this animal upon which their lives depended.

The she-camel was a miraculous sign from God (Allah) meant to test the people of Thamūd, a powerful and advanced civilization, yet despite their material success, they had abandoned the worship of God (Allah) and turned to idol worship, engaging in corruption and disobedience.

The leaders of Thamūd, adamant in their rejection of monotheism and devotion to idol worship, dismissed Prophet Salih's message. To justify their disbelief, they presented what they thought was an impossible challenge: they would accept his prophethood only if he could bring forth a camel from a specific rock. Through His boundless power, Allah answered their challenge by causing an extraordinary she-camel to emerge from the solid stone – a miracle that defied the laws of nature and materialized precisely as they had demanded. This divine sign, fulfilling their exact specifications, demolished any rational grounds for continued skepticism.

This she-camel was not like any other camel. She was extraordinary in her size, appearance, and behavior. The Qur'an describes her as **"a sign from Allah"** [Qur'an 7:73]. She was a miraculous creation, meant to serve as a



Guest Column

HATIM HEGAB

clear warning and a test for the people of Thamūd. Allah commanded that the she-camel be allowed to roam freely and drink from the town's well on designated days. On the days when she drank, the people were not to take any water from that well. In return, the camel provided them with milk, enough for the entire community. This arrangement was a trial for the people of Thamūd—to see if they would respect the command of Allah and recognize His power.

Even in the face of this undeniable miracle, the leaders of Thamūd doubled down on their defiance. Rather than accepting the she-camel as divine proof, they began to view her as a threat to their authority and lifestyle. The water-sharing arrangement mandated by Allah – alternating days between her and the townspeople – particularly rankled them. Instead of appreciating the blessing of her abundant milk freely given to all, they twisted this gift into a grievance. The powerful elites, already hostile to Prophet Salih's message of monotheism and social justice, launched a campaign of resentment against the miraculous creature. They

manipulated public opinion by spreading false claims that the camel was depleting their water resources, transforming what was meant to be a sign of divine mercy into a source of community conflict.

Their resentment turned into a dangerous plot. A group of nine men, described in the Qur'an as the worst among them, conspired to kill the she-camel, the Qur'an tells us, **"In the city was a gang of nine who made mischief in the land, and would not reform."** [Qur'an 27:48]. First, they planned to eliminate Prophet Salih (pbuh) and his family and tell his guardians that they didn't know who did it. They then changed the plot to kill the she-camel, thinking they could end Prophet Salih's influence by killing her.

One of them took the lead in executing their wicked plan. With the approval of the other conspirators, he attacked the she-camel, first hamstringing her to prevent her from escaping. Then they proceeded to kill her, defying the explicit command of Allah and the warning of Prophet Salih. This heinous act was not just an attack on an animal – it was a direct challenge to Allah's authority and a sign of the people's deep-seated defiance.

When Prophet Salih learned what they had done, he was filled with sorrow. He reminded them they had crossed a line from which there was no return, he told them,

"Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. That is a promise not to be denied" [Qur'an 11:65]. This was their final warning – a short respite before their destruction.

True to the divine warning, after three days, a terrible punishment descended upon the people of Thamūd. The Qur'an describes their destruction in several places, revealing the severity of their fate. A mighty deafening blast from the sky and they were all dead. This powerful punishment wiped them out entirely, leaving nothing but their ruined homes carved into the mountains. Allah the Almighty says, **"Indeed, We sent upon them one blast from the sky, and they became like the dry stubble of a pen-builder."** [Qur'an 54-31] Their arrogance, defiance, and disobedience had led to their downfall, serving as a warning for future generations. This verse is a miracle in itself! It shows how sound can kill people. One must contemplate how Prophet Muhammad could have known this scientific fact in the 7th century.

The story of the she-camel is a powerful lesson in faith, humility, and obedience to God. It teaches us that when God sends clear signs, they must be respected, understood, and followed. The people of Thamūd had everything—wealth, intelligence, and strength—but their arrogance led them to destruction. They failed to recognize the mercy of Allah,

His acceptance of their request, and granting them their demand. They answered all these blessings by seeking to eliminate them. Their fate is a stark reminder that no amount of power can protect those who reject divine truth.

The ruins of the Thamūd still stand today in the region known as "Madain Saleh," a testimony to the truth of the Qur'anic account. Their abandoned homes, carved into the rocks, are a silent witness to the punishment that befell them. The Qur'an frequently urges us to reflect on their fate and learn from their mistakes.

The Qur'an miraculously describes the story in a few verses, **"In the city was a gang of nine who made mischief in the land and would not reform. They said, 'Swear by Allah to one another that we will attack him and his family at night, and then say to his guardian, 'We did not witness the murder of his family, and we are being truthful.'"** They planned a plan, and We (God) planned a plan, but they did not realize. So note the outcome of their planning: **We destroyed them and their people, all altogether. Here are their houses, in ruins, on account of their iniquities. Surely this is a lesson for people who know. And We saved those who believed and were reverent."** [Qur'an 27: 45-53].

Author: hatim.hegab@gmail.com

Information: icstillwater.org/islam