

# Prophets in the Qur'an: Shu'ayb (pbuh)

In this article, we shall continue the stories of the Prophets as mentioned in the Qur'an. The prophets' stories are rich with wisdom and lessons. They reveal the different forms of corruption that emerged among human societies and how the prophets and messengers responded to them. These stories offer guidance on personal ethics, social justice, and spiritual integrity. Religion, after all, is a comprehensive system that encompasses all aspects of life — social, political, economic, and spiritual.

For example, the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph, peace be upon him, pbuh) explores the theme of social corruption, and the narrative of Prophet Musa (Moses, pbuh) highlights political tyranny in his confrontation with Pharaoh. Today, we delve into the story of Prophet Shu'ayb (pbuh), which provides deep insight into financial corruption.

Prophet Shu'ayb (pnuh) was an Arab prophet (historically called the extinct Arabs). Shu'ayb is one of the four Arab prophets (Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, and Muhammad) and a descendant of Midian, the son of Ibrahim (Abraham, pbuh). The Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, referred to him as "the eloquent preacher among the prophets," recognizing his persuasive and heartfelt discourse with his people.

Shu'ayb was sent to the people of Madyan, a community north of the Arabian Peninsula, close to the region once inhab-

ited by the people of Lut (Lot). These people not only disbelieved in God, but they also engaged in severe forms of economic corruption and injustice. They worshipped a tree called al-Aykah and are referred to in the Qur'an as "the people of the thicket." Allah describes them: "The people of the thicket were indeed wrongdoers" [Qur'an, 15:78].

Their corruption extended beyond idolatry. They were notorious for theft, fraudulent trade practices, and deception. They cheated others in business, tampered with weights and measures, and exploited economic systems for personal gain. Shu'ayb addressed these transgressions directly. The Qur'an says, **"And to Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu'ayb. He said, 'O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. There has come to you clear evidence from your Lord. So give full measure and weight and do not deprive people of their due, and do not cause corruption on the earth after its reform. That is better for you if you are believers.'"** [Qur'an, 7:85].

He reminded them that manipulating financial systems is not a trivial act. It erodes trust, destabilizes societies, and invites divine anger. Prophet Shu'ayb (pbuh) began his mission with genuine concern and kindness. His tone was not that of condemnation but of compassion. The Qur'an says, **"O my people, worship**



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**Allah; you have no deity other than Him. And do not reduce the measure and weight. Indeed, I see you in prosperity, but I fear for you the punishment of an encompassing Day."** [Qur'an, 11:84]. Shu'ayb made it clear that his goal was not control but reform. He told them: **"I only intend reform as much as I am able. And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I rely, and to Him I turn."** [Qur'an, 11:88].

Shu'ayb understood that change could not be imposed. The mission of the prophets was to invite, not to compel. Reform is the goal of all Da'wah (calling to God), and it must come from within people's hearts.

Despite his gentleness and sincerity, the people of Madyan responded with arrogance and mockery. They clung to the religion of their forefathers and treated Shu'ayb's message with suspicion: **"They said, 'O Shu'ayb, does your prayer command you that we should leave what our forefathers worship or not deal with our wealth as we please? You are indeed the forbearing, the right-minded!'"** [Qur'an, 11:87].

They tried to ridicule his intelligence, accusing

him of being overly idealistic. But their mockery revealed a deeper issue — they saw wealth as absolute personal property, not as a trust from God.

Islam teaches that wealth is a trust. We will be asked how we earned it and how we spent it. It is not an object for vanity or oppression. Shu'ayb's people's response shows a common tendency to resist accountability, especially in matters of money and power.

Despite the ridicule, Shu'ayb (pbuh) remained focused. He warned them against repeating the mistakes of past nations: **"And O my people, let not your dissension from me cause you to suffer what befell the people of Noah or Hud or Salih. And the people of Lot are not far from you."** [Qur'an, 11:89]. He reminded them that material wealth is temporary, but the consequences of injustice are lasting. Still, the people accused him of being under the influence of magic and demanded a sign: **"They said, 'You are but of those affected by magic... So cause fragments of the sky to fall upon us, if you should be of the truthful.'"** [Qur'an, 26:185-187].

When mockery and disbelief escalated into threats, they warned Shu'ayb and his followers of expulsion or forced reversion: **"The arrogant ones among his people said, 'We will surely evict you, O Shu'ayb, and those who have believed with you from our town, or you must return to our reli-**

**gion.' He said, 'Even if we were unwilling?'"** [Qur'an, 7:88].

At one point, they even threatened him with death: **"They said, 'O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say, and indeed we see you weak among us. Were it not for your family, we would have stoned you.'"** [Qur'an, 11:91].

Despite their threats, Shu'ayb turned to God for justice: **"O my people, work according to your position; indeed, I am working. You will come to know who will be visited by a humiliating punishment... My Lord is watchful over all things."** [Qur'an, 11:93] and **"Our Lord, decide between us and our people in truth, and You are the best of those who give decision."** [Qur'an, 7:89].

Then came the punishment. First, the wind ceased, and the heat became unbearable. A humid stillness gripped the town. Suddenly, a massive dark cloud appeared, and the people, desperate for shade, gathered beneath it: **"But they denied him, so the punishment of the Day of the Canopy seized them. Indeed, it was the punishment of a terrible day."** [Qur'an, 26:189]. Then came the earthquake: **"So the earthquake seized them, and they became lifeless bodies in their homes"** [Qur'an, 7:91]. Gabriel (pbuh) followed with a piercing cry that ended their lives: **"And those who wronged were overcome by the blast, and they became**

**lifeless bodies in their homes."** [Qur'an, 11:94].

After their destruction, Shu'ayb (pbuh) turned away from the ruins of his people with sorrow: **"So he turned away from them and said, 'O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the messages of my Lord and advised you, so how could I grieve over a disbelieving people?'"** [Qur'an, 7:93].

The story of Shu'ayb (pbuh) and the people of Madyan is more than a historical account — it is a mirror reflecting the consequences of financial misconduct and moral decline. It illustrates that economic corruption — whether through theft, fraud, deceit, or exploitation — is not a personal sin alone but a societal poison.

In the divine system, money is a means, not an end. Islam forbids interest (usury), deception, monopolization, and unjust enrichment. When a society abandons these values, it invites the wrath of Allah — not just in the Hereafter, but in this world as well. The legacy of Prophet Shu'ayb (pbuh) reminds us that true faith requires honesty in all dealings, especially in the realm of finance.

Economic integrity is a form of worship and a pillar of justice. As individuals and communities, we must strive to build systems grounded in trust, equity, and accountability.

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