

Section 8: Salih Preaches Righteousness to the People of Thamud

Surah Ash-Shu'ara – Verses 141–145

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ صَالِحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

141. “The Thamud (people) belied the messengers.”

142. “When their brother Salih said to them: ‘Will you not fear (Allah)?’

143. “Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger.”

144. “Then be in awe of Allah and obey me.”

145. “And I do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds.”

The life stories of a few prophets have been told in this Surah, each of which begins with the word ‘Belied’. This is because in these stories the most important point is the subject of prophets being rejected by the ancient people and their destruction.

Yes, in writing and speaking, the important points must come first. Therefore, in these stories there have been stated nothing about the number of their people, the name of their places, the date of the events and other details, because what is a gazing-stock is to show the manifestations of right and wrong and to state the victory of divine truth and the defeat of wrong.

However, the fifth part of the story of the prophets, which has been mentioned in this Surah, is the story of the people of Thamud and their prophet Salih (as) which is told precisely and briefly.

They lived in a land called/wadiyul qura/, located between Medina and Syria, and they had a comfortable life, but as the result of disobedience and contumacy, they were so destroyed that there is no sign from them today.

This story begins from the people of ‘Ad and the people of Noah, and it shows how the events of history repeat.

The verse says:

“The Thamud (people) belied the messengers.”

The Divine prophets preached the same call, and when the people of Thamud belied their prophet, Salih, indeed they belied all the Divine messengers.

After mentioning this short explanation, the Qur’an talks in details, where it says:

“When their brother Salih said to them: ‘Will you not fear (Allah)?”

Salih (as) who, as a brother, was a kind leader and a guide for his people, had no superiority over them and no material benefits did he demand from them. Therefore, the Qur’an introduces him as their brother to them.

Like all prophets of Allah, Salih (as) begins his invitation with piety and feeling responsibility. Then he (as) implicitly refers to his good background among them as a reference for the veracity of his claim.

He says:

“Verily I am unto you a trustworthy messenger.”

Therefore, Salih recommended them that they should be pious, be in awe of Allah, and obey him, because he wanted for them nothing but the pleasure of Allah, their goodness, and prosperity.

He said to them:

“Then be in awe of Allah and obey me.”

As a reason for the truthfulness of his statement, and that his struggle was for Allah, he added:

“And I do not ask you any recompense for it, my recompense is only from the Lord of the worlds.”

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 146–150

أَتَتْرَكُونَ فِي مَا هَاهُنَا آمِنِينَ

فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ

وَزُرُوعٍ وَنَخْلٍ طَلْعُهَا هَضِيمٌ

وَتَنْحِتُونَ مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا فَارِهِينَ

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا

146. “Will you be left secure, in (the enjoyment of) all that you have here?”

147. “In the gardens and springs,”

148. “And cornfields and date palms with slender spathes?”

149. “And you hew houses (skillfully) out of the mountains exultingly.”

150. “Then be in awe of Allah and obey me.”

When the bounties of security, finance, and welfare are not enriched with the obedience from the

immaculate Imam, they work as a preparation for mischief and corruption.

Man is not free in front of Divine bounties, but he has responsibility before them. That is why in this verse the Qur'an refers to the sensitive points of their life. And, in a court procedure, through their inner sense, their prophet condemns them.

He asks them whether they imagine that they remain safe and sound fully in that security and affluence of bounties forever. Do they think that this material and negligent life is eternal and that they will not counter death, revenge, and retribution?

Then he explains his previous brief sentence in details when he asks them whether they think that they will live eternally in these gardens, springs, and fanning lands that produce ripe, sweet, and pleasant fruits.

The verse says:

“Will you be left secure, in (the enjoyment of) all that you have here?”

“In the gardens and springs,”

“And cornfields and date palms with slender spathes?”

Then it refers to their strong and comfortable houses, and says:

“And you hew houses (skillfully) out of the mountains exultingly.”

The Arabic word /farih/ is derived from /farah/ originally in the sense of ‘joy accompanied with unawareness and sensuality’. Sometimes it has also been used in the sense of skillfulness in doing an action. Although both meanings are in line with the above verse, regarding to the reproach and blame of Salih (as), the first meaning seems more appropriate.

Comparing these verses with the qualities mentioned in the former verses about the people of ‘Ad, it is understood that the People of ‘Ad mostly used to apply egotism, love of position, and ostentation, while the People of Thamud were mostly the captives of their belies, comfortable life, and affluence.

But they were alike each other in one evil thing, they both ignore the call of Divine prophets for coming out of the prison of egotism and reaching the rank of theism and, consequently, they were punished as the retribution of their deeds.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 151–152

وَلَا تُطِيعُوا أَمْرَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

الَّذِينَ يُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا يُصْلِحُونَ

151. “And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant,”

152. “Those who make mischief in the earth, and amend not.”

Immoderation is a kind of corruption, and a spendthrift is a mischief monger and a corrupter.

You must not expect any improvement from the painless persons who live in welfare, since improvement comes into being only under the light of the Divine prophets’ school. So, these couple of verses imply that the extravagant should not be obeyed, and those who are corrupters must not be expected improvement from.

The verses say as follows:

“And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant,”

“Those who make mischief in the earth, and amend not.”

Of course, we know that extravagance is the same as exceeding the limits of law, the law of creation and the law of religion. This is also clear for all that in a correct system any exceeding the limit causes corruption and destruction; and in other words, the origin of corruption is extravagance and the consequence of extravagance is mischief.

Of course, it should be noted that extravagance has a vast meaning. Sometimes it is used in simple issues like eating and drinking.¹

Sometimes it is in spendthrift and too much remittal.²

Sometimes it is in judgment and judiciary arbitration which leads to falsehood.³

Sometimes it is in one’s beliefs, which leads to doubt and skepticism, (as it is in Surah Al-Qafir, No. 40, verse 34, where /musrif/ (extravagant) and /murtab/ (doubter) have come with together).

Sometimes it has been used in the sense of self-superiority, arrogance, and exploitation, (as in Surah Ad-Dukhan, No. 44, verse 31 the Qur’an says about Pharaoh:

“...surely he was haughty, (and) one of the extravagant.”)

And, finally, sometimes it has been applied to any sin and fault, (as in Surah Az-Zumar, No. 39, verse 53 the Qur’an says:

“Say: ‘O My servants! Who have acted extravagantly against their own selves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives the faults altogether, surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.”)

Regarding to what was said, thus the relation between extravagance and corruption was made manifest well.

According to the statement of ‘Allamah Tabataba’i in Al-Mizan, the world of existence is wholly order, righteousness, and benefit and, even with the contrast which may sometimes be seen in its parts, it contains so much agreement. This system is moving towards some righteous aims, and it arranges a particular path for each of its parts.

Now, if one of these parts deviates from its orbit and paves the path of corruption, there will arise a conflict between this part and other parts of this world. If this extravagant part can be returned to its main orbit, the better, otherwise they will destroy it so that the system can continue its own way.

Man, who is one of the parts of this world of existence, is not an exception from this general law.

If he goes forth according to his nature and be harmonious with the system of creation, he will attain the prosperous aim that has been determined for him, but if he exceeds his limits and steps in the path of corruption and mischief in the earth, at first Allah warns him by punishing him with grievous and painful events, as Surah Ar-Rum, No. 30, verse 41 says:

“Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return.”

But if this could not be effective and corruption has influenced into the depth of his self, Allah will wipe out the face of the earth from the dirt of the existence of such a person by the punishment of ‘Istisal.⁴

(It is the Divine punishment which comes for the incorrigible people to annihilate them to which no prayer is beneficial at this time)

Thus, it makes fairly clear that why Allah has mentioned ‘extravagance’ and ‘corruption in the land’ and the lack of improvement in the above mentioned verses in the same row.

Some Traditions Upon Extravagance and Corruption

1– Amir-ul-Mu’mineen, Ali (as), said:

“Extravagance is blameworthy in all things, except in the righteous deeds.”⁵

2– There is a tradition recorded in Al-Kafi and the Commentary of ‘Ayyashi which is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) who said to a man:

“Be in awe of Allah and be not extravagant nor (take the life) strait (for yourself) and move between them; verily squandering is of the extravagances as Allah has said:

‘...and do not squander wastefully’6. ”7

3– Imam Sadiq (as) once said:

“Verily, extravagance is accompanied with scanty of bounty.”8

4– The Prophet (S) once passed by Sa’d while he was making ablution, then he (S) told him:

“What is this extravagance (using too much water), O’ Sa’d?”

He said:

“Is there extravagance even in ablution?”

The Prophet (S) answered:

“Yes, even if you are by a spring.”

5– Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

“The outside corruption originates from the inside corruption. Whoever improves his inside, Allah will improve his outside, and whoever proves treacherous with Allah in secret, Allah will make his secret manifest in outside.”9

6– Amir-ul-Mu’mineen, Ali (as) says:

“Being unjust to the servants of Allah causes the Hereafter to be corrupted.”10

7– The holy Prophet (S) said:

“How will be your situation when your wives are corrupted and your youths are mischievous and you do not enjoin what is good and do not forbid what is wrong?... ”11

8– Imam Amir-ul-Mu’mineen Ali (as) said:

“Avoid any speech and action that causes the corruption of (your) Hereafter and religion.”12

Surah Ash-Shu’ara – Verses 153–154

قَالُوا إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مِنَ الْمُسَحَّرِينَ

مَا أَنْتَ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا فَأْتِ بِآيَةٍ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

153. “They said: ‘You are only of the bewitched ones’,”

154. “You are no more than a mortal, like us, so bring you a sign if you are one of the truthful.”

Prophets were denigrated in two things; sorcerer and being bewitched.

The former verses contained the benevolent and reasonable logic of Salih in the face of that deviated group of people. Now these holy verses deliver the logic of those people.

The verses declares:

“They said: ‘You are only of the bewitched ones’,”

Moreover, they used to say that their prophet was a human being like them and no intellect lets them follow and obey such a mortal; so they demanded him a proper sign.

Here is what they said:

“You are no more than a mortal, like us, so bring you a sign if you are one of the truthful.”

The Arabic word /musahhar/ is derived from the word /sihr/ and it means ‘the one who is bewitched’. They believed that the sorcerers sometimes cause the persons’ talent and intellect to become powerless or feeble by means of sorcery.

They not only used this denigration for Prophet Salih (as) but also a group of other prophets were accused of it. As Surah Al-Furqan, No. 25, verse 8 indicates, the oppressors said to the believers that they followed a man who, as the result of being bewitched, has lost his intellect.

Yes, they considered intelligence in the manner that a man behaves according to his surrounding and does the same as others do in his environment, so that he adjust himself with all the vices over there.

If a godly and revolutionary man rose against the corrupted beliefs and a wrong system, according to this logic, they would call him mad, insane and bewitched.

Surah Ash-Shu‘ara – Verses 155–157

قَالَ هَذِهِ نَاقَةٌ لَهَا شِرْبٌ وَلَكُمْ شِرْبُ يَوْمٍ مَّعْلُومٍ

وَلَا تَمَسُّوْهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

فَعَقَرُوهَا فَأَصْبَحُوا نَادِمِينَ

155. “He said: ‘Here is a she-camel; she shall have her portion of water (one day), and you have your portion of water on an appointed day’,”

156. “And do not touch her with evil, least the punishment of a grievous day should overtake you.”

157. “Then they hamstrung her, and became regretful.”

A miracle must be so manifest that all people, in every level they are, can understand its miraculous state. (Here is a she-camel)

Allah is omnipotent and easily can bring miracles into existence, whether it is the moon that did rend asunder, 13 or the water of the sea that clave asunder, 14 and the mountain that clave asunder and a she-camel came out of it; all of these are indifferent for Him, the Mighty.

Salih’s She-camel was hamstrung by a single person, yet the Qur’an says:

“They hamstrung her”,

namely a group hamstrung her, because those people were content with the deed of that person.

Imam Ali (as) says:

*“Certainly the she-camel of Thamud was hamstrung by only one, but Allah held all of them in punishment because all of them joined him by their acquiescing in their consenting to it...”*¹⁵

However, this disobedient group, not for understanding the right but for seeking pretext, asked Salih for a miracle. Since the argument should be completed to them, then Salih, by the command of Allah, spoke to them as follows:

“He said: ‘Here is a she-camel; she shall have her portion of water (one day), and you have your portion of water on an appointed day’,”

The Arabic word /naqah/ means a she-camel. The Qur’an has talked about the characteristics of this camel, which has had a miraculous situation, in brief and it has not mentioned its entire specialties, but we know that it had not been an ordinary camel.

As some commentators have said this she-camel, in a miraculous manner, came out from inside of a mountain. One of its qualities was that it specialized the water of the spring of the town every other day to itself and drunk it, as it is said in the above verse and the 28th verse of Surah Al-Qamar, No. 54.

However, Salih (as) was commissioned to announce to them that they should leave that wonderful and

extraordinary she-camel, which was as the sign of the unlimited Power of Allah, to itself, and he ordered that they should not hurt it the least.

Here is the command:

“And do not touch her with evil, lest the punishment of a grievous day should over take you.”

Of course, the disobedient people, who did not want that those deceived people became aware, and considered the people's awareness as a barrier for their interests, planned to kill the she-camel. Finally they attacked the camel and, by one strike or more, they killed it and then, when they saw the Divine punishment was nigh, they became regretful of what they had done.

The verse says:

“Then they hamstrung her, and became regretful.”¹⁶

Surah Ash-Shu'ara - Verses 158-159

فَأَخَذَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

158. “So the punishment overtook them; verily in this there is sign, but most of them do not believe.”

159. “And verily your Lord, He is certainly the Mighty, the Merciful.”

Sacrilege and blasphemy is so important that for killing an animal sometimes a group of people may be destroyed by Divine punishment.

(Then they hamstrung her... So the punishment overtook them)

The wrath and punishment of Allah is because of our own deed, else He is Merciful.

So, in this holy verse, the Qur'an implies that since their rebellion exceeded the limits and they actually showed that they would not accept the truth, the will of Allah, or the Divine providence, was to purify the face of the earth from the dirt of their existence and He annihilated them.

The verse says:

“So the punishment overtook them...”

As Surah Al-’A’raf, No. 7, verse 78, and Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 67 briefly indicate, a severe earthquake did shake their land, and, when they woke up and were sitting on their knees, the event did not give them any respite, a fatal lightning, which was accompanied with earthquake, ruined the walls over them, and at the same time, they died in an astonishing horror.

At the end of the explanation of the event, the holy Qur’an repeats the same thing that was stated at the end of the explanation of the events of the people of Hud, the people of Noah, and the people of Abraham.

It says:

“...verily in this there is sign, but most of them do not believe.”

This verse implies that with the effort and endeavour of this great prophet, Salih, and the sufferings that he tolerated while he had a clear logic, those black hearted ungodly people obstinately showed their opposition with that awakening miracle and, consequently, they encountered an evil destiny which is an instructive lesson for others.

Yes, none can defeat the Power of Allah, as this great might is not a hinder for His mercy to be showered over His friends and even over His enemies.

The verse says:

“And verily your Lord, He is certainly the Mighty, the Merciful.”

Thus, not only His mercy and favours are the signs of admonition, but also His wrath and punishment works as a sign:

“...verily in this there is a sign...”

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1. as it is referred to in Surah Al-’A’raf, No. 7, verse 33
 2. as it is mentioned in Surah Al-Furqan, No. 25, verse 67
 3. as in Surah Al-Qafir, No. 40, verse 28 an extravagant person and a liar both are set in a row
 4. Al-Mizan, Vol. 15, P. 333
 5. Qurar-ul-Hikam, Vol. 1, P. 83
 6. Surah ‘Asra’, No. 17, verse 26
 7. At-Tafsir-us-Safi, P. 283, old edition
 8. Raudatul-Muttaqin, Vol. 3, P. 194
 9. Tafsir-us-Safi, P. 373, old edition
 10. Qurar-ul-Hikam, Vol. 2, P. 475
 11. Bihar-ul-’Anwar, Vol. 74, P. 153
 12. Qurar-ul-Hikam, Vol. 1, P. 142

13. Surah Al-Qamar, No. 54, verse 1
14. Surah Ash-Shu'ara, No. 26, verse 63
15. Nahj-ul-Balaqah, sermon 201
16. The Qur'anic phrase /'aqaruha/ is derived from the word /'uqr/ which originally means: 'root and the base of something'. It is sometimes used in the sense of 'to kill' and sometimes in the sense of 'to hamstring' an animal', too.

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