

Prophet Saleh (as)

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The story of Salih is linked to the story of the She-Camel of God, which was the gift given by God to the people of Thamud when they desired a miracle to confirm that Salih was truly a prophet. The Thamud were a tribal confederation in the north-western region of the Arabian Peninsula, mentioned in Assyrian sources in the time of Sargon II. The tribe's name continues to appear in documents into the fourth century CE, but by the sixth century they were regarded as a group that had vanished long ago. According to the Qur'an, the city that Saleh was sent to was called Al-Hijr, which corresponds to the Nabataean city of Hegra. The city rose to prominence around the first century AD as an important site in the regional caravan trade. Adjacent to the city were large, decorated rock-cut tombs used by members of various religious groups. At an unknown point in ancient times, the site was abandoned and possibly functionally replaced by Al-'Ula.

Outside of the Islamic and Baha'i Faiths, Saleh is not mentioned in any other Abrahamic scripture or contemporary historical text, but the account of Thamud's destruction may have been well known in ancient Arabia. The tribe's name is used in ancient Arabian poetry as a metaphor for "the transience of all things."

### In Islam

Saleh's life in his community had been so righteous that the people of Thamud virtually relied upon him for support. He was chosen by God as a Messenger

and sent to preach against the selfishness of the wealthy and to condemn the practice of shirk (idolatry or polytheism). Although Saleh preached the message for a sustained period of time, the people of Thamud refused to hear his warning and instead began to ask Saleh to perform a miracle for them. They said: "O Salih! You are of us! A centre of our hopes! Why do you forbid the worship of what our forefathers worshiped? We have suspicions about what you invite us to."

Saleh reminded his people of the countless castles and palaces they built out of stone, and of their technological superiority over neighbouring communities. Furthermore, he told them about their ancestors, the Ad tribe, and how they were destroyed for their sins. Some of the people of Thamud believed Saleh's words, but the tribal leaders refused to listen to him and continued to demand that he demonstrate a miracle to prove his prophethood.

In response, God gave the Thamud nation a blessed she-camel, as both a means of sustenance and as a test. The tribe was told to allow the camel to graze peacefully and avoid harming her. But in defiance of Saleh's warning, the people of the tribe slaughtered the camel. Saleh informed them that they had three days to live before the wrath of God descended upon them. The people of the city were remorseful, but their crime could not be undone, and all the disbelieving people in the city were killed by a terrible earthquake. Al-Hijr was rendered uninhabited and remained in ruins for all time thereafter. Saleh himself and the few believers who followed him survived.

The story is expanded upon in Surat an-Naml, it states that nine men plotted to kill Salih and his whole family, a crime for which they were struck down by God three days later.

### **Muslim tradition**

Al-Tabari states that Saleh summoned his people to a mountain, where they witnessed a rock miraculously split open, revealing the camel. The she-camel had a young calf. Saleh informed the Thamud people that the older camel was to drink from their water source on one day, and they were to drink from it the next day. On days when they were not allowed to drink water, the camel provided them with milk. But God informed Saleh that a boy who would hamstring the camel would soon be born to the tribe, and that child was evil and grew up unnaturally fast. The camel was indeed killed, and its calf cried out for three times consecutively, signalling that the Thamud would be destroyed in three days. Their faces turned yellow, then red, then black, and they died on the third day as predicted.

According to some Islamic scholars, the mother of Ismail, Hajar, was a granddaughter of the prophet Salih.

A similar tradition is related in an eighth-century commentary on Islam by John of Damascus and is also mentioned in the works of Ibn Kathir.

## Baha'i Faith

The founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, briefly mentioned the story of the slaughtered she-camel in the Lawh-i-Burhán, and commented also upon Saleh's ministry saying that the she-camel symbolizes the spirit of Saleh and the camel's milk refers to the spiritual food that he offered to his people.

Saleh, was a descendant of the great Prophet Nuh. He was sent by Allah to the nation of Thamud who lived in Al Hijr, located in Arabia. The nation over a few generations had matured and became very powerful, wealthy and influential.

The Qur'an mentions how the society grew very proud of their accomplishments and began building huge castles, palaces, and other structures as status symbol of their power. This is mentioned in Surah Ash Shura: "You construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves? And take for yourselves palaces and fortresses so you may abide eternally?" (Qur'an 42: 128-129)

They were given a chance by Allah to turn back to Him, especially knowing what had happened to the people of 'Ad for their disobedience. The Qur'an mentions the warning from Prophet Hud who said, "Why do you not fear Allah?" (Qur'an 26:124). They denied these warnings as obsession with materialism overtook them. They turned away from the truth, and so the poor began worshiping the rich who proclaimed themselves as Gods.

Saleh was a man from a very high standing in society. He built a reputation of respect and was wealthy himself. The People of Thamud held him in high regard for his wisdom and virtue and were prepared to appoint him as their leader. It was during this period that Allah bestowed Saleh with Prophethood.

Prophet Saleh reminded his people, “O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. He has produced you from the earth and settled you in it. So ask forgiveness of Him and then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is near and responsive” (Qur’an II: 61)

Saleh continued to urge his people to obey him and fear and worship Allah. But they replied, “O Saleh, you were among us a man of promise before this. Why do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worshipped?”

### Second story

As the days passed by, the Thamud feared that Prophet Saleh’s followers would increase in number. In an attempt to put him off, they planned to ask Saleh for a miracle proving that he was indeed the messenger of Allah. They intended to make this miracle impossible to be brought about. So the main leaders of the Thamud sat down together and confronted Saleh. They pointed at a particular enormous rock and demanded Saleh to bring out from it a she camel that was extremely tall, very woolly, attractive and ten months pregnant! They further stipulated that it should be able to produce milk for the entire town.

Saleh was desperate to bring his people to the path of Allah. So he pleaded with Allah to grant him what the people had asked for. And there came the

day when Saleh gathered his people to witness the coming of the miracle. Allah ordered that very rock to split asunder and from it emerged a red, gigantic, ten month pregnant she-camel, much to the awe and amazement of the people. It was a clear evidence in their midst that a number of people declared their faith. However, the vast majority remained untouched and pursued their disbelief, stating this was nothing but pure magic.

### Side note:

Some narrations believe the camel did not have a miraculous birth or dispute that it came from a rock, the Qur'an simply states, "O my people, this is the she-camel of Allah – she is to you a sign. So let her feed upon Allah's earth and do not harm her, or you will be taken by an impending punishment.

The she-camel was indeed a living miracle that every passing day people converted to Islam. The disbelievers could not bear this. Eventually their hatred for Saleh was diverted towards the she-camel. Saleh feared that the disbelievers would conspire against the she-camel and warned them, "O my people! This she camel of Allah is a sign, leave her to feed on Allah's earth, do not harm her, lest a torment may seize you." The Thamud initially allowed the she-camel to graze on their land and drink freely from the common well but this was short-lived. It wasn't long before Thamud became disgruntled, the believers found their faith increasing while the disbelievers' hatred intensified to a degree where they began plotting to kill the camel.

With the support of all the disbelievers in town, nine men set out aiming to kill the she-camel. They watched her closely. As she approached to drink from

the well one of the men shot her in the leg, thereby hindering her from escape. The others immediately sprang forward and put a sword through her body, killing her.

The townspeople saw this as a clear victory and cheered loudly for the men. They went on to slaughter the she-camel and eat her meat. When Saleh heard of this he rushed to warn them, but it was too late. The people mocked him saying, “O Saleh, bring us what you promise us, if you are truly a messenger.” Saleh replied, “Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. That is a promise that will not be denied.” (Qur’an 11: 65)

The disbelievers taunted Saleh and asked him to bring on the punishment. Prophet Saleh said, “O my people, why are you impatient for evil instead of good? Why don’t you seek forgiveness from Allah, so you may receive mercy?” The people paid no attention to him. They were only infuriated and began plotting to kill Prophet Saleh. The nine men gathered together and discussed, “Take a mutual oath by Allah that we will kill Saleh by night, him and his family. Then we will say, ‘We did not witness the destruction of his family, and indeed, we are truthful.’” (Qur’an 27: 49)

Meanwhile Allah had a plan for the people of Thamud, “They planned their plan, and We planned Our plan, while they perceived it not” (Qur’an 27: 50) so Allah instructed Saleh to gather his followers and leave town. The people were only too happy to be rid of him. The Thamud possessed excellent craftsmanship, so much so that they carved their houses out of the dense rock of the mountains. This made them feel secure. They believed their rock fortresses would protect them from various disasters.



Three days after Salih's warning, thunderbolts filled the air, followed by severe earthquakes which destroyed the entire tribe and its homeland. The land was so violently shaken, that it destroyed every living creature on it. There was one terrific cry which had hardly ended when the disbelievers of Salih's people were struck dead, one and all, at the same time. Neither their strong buildings, nor their rock hewn homes could protect them.



The disbelievers of Thamud had no ally that day. They had incurred the wrath of Allah which caused them to be destroyed before they realised what was happening. Meanwhile, Saleh and the believers were saved by Allah's grace. Saleh returned to Al Hijr one day to witness the destruction of his people and said with a heavy heart, "O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the message of my Lord, I gave you good advice, but you did not care." Saleh then migrated to Palestine, where he lived until his death.

### Hadith

Ibn Umar narrated that while the Prophet Muhammad (saw) was passing by Thamud's houses on his way to the battle of Tabuk, he stopped together with the people there. the people fetched water from the wells from which the

people of Thamud drank. They prepared their dough for baking bread and filled their water skins from the wells. The Prophet of Allah (saw) ordered them to empty their water skins and give the prepared dough to the camels. He warned them against entering upon the people that had been punished, saying "I fear that you may be affected by what afflicted them; so do not enter their territory (Saudi's have opened up this area for tourists)."

Salih lived for 280 years and his grave is in Wadi l-Salam cemetery in Najaf, Iraq.