

Surah 17. Al-Israa

Asad: And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones,] with miraculous signs [in its wake], save [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [only too often] gave the lie to them:⁷¹ thus, We provided for [the tribe of] Thamud the she-camel as a light-giving portent, and they sinned against it.⁷² And never did We send those signs for any other purpose than to convey a warning. Malik: We refrain from sending signs (miracles) only because the men of former generations treated them as false. For example, We sent the she-camel to the people of Thamud - a manifest sign - but they laid violent hands on her. We send the signs only by way of warning, and if people reject the sign after receiving it, they are doomed.

Mustafa Khattab:

Nothing keeps Us from sending the ?demanded? signs except that they had ?already? been denied by earlier peoples. And We gave Thamud the she-camel as a clear sign, but they wrongfully rejected it.¹ We only send the signs as a warning.

Pickthall: Naught hindereth Us from sending portents save that the folk of old denied them. And We gave Thamud the she-camel--a clear portent--but they did wrong in respect of her. We send not portents save to warn.

Yusuf Ali: And We refrain from sending the Signs only because the men of former generations treated them as false: We sent the She-camel: to the Thamud to open their eyes but they treated her wrongfully: We only send the Signs by way of terror (and warning from evil). ^{2245 2246 2247}

Transliteration: Wama manaAAana an nursila bialayati illa an kaththaba biha alawwaloona waatayna thamooda alInnaqata mubsiratan fathalamoo biha wama nursilu bialayati illa takhweefan

Author Comments

71 - This highly elliptic sentence has a fundamental bearing on the purport of the Qur'an as a whole. In many places the Qur'an stresses the fact that the Prophet Muhammad, despite his being the last and greatest of God's apostles, was not empowered to perform miracles similar to those with which the earlier prophets are said to have reinforced their verbal messages. His only miracle was and is the Qur'an itself--a message perfect in its lucidity and ethical comprehensiveness, destined for all times and all stages of human development, addressed not merely to the feelings but also to the minds of men, open to everyone, whatever his race or social environment, and bound to remain unchanged forever. Since the earlier prophets invariably appealed to their own community and their own time alone, their teachings were, of necessity, circumscribed by the social and intellectual conditions of that particular community and time; and since the people to whom they addressed themselves had not yet reached the stage of independent thinking, those prophets stood in need of symbolic portents or miracles (see surah {6}, note [94]) in order to make the people concerned realize the inner truth of their mission. The message of the Qur'an, on the other hand, was revealed at a time when mankind (and, in particular, that part of it which inhabited the regions marked by the earlier, Judaeo-Christian religious development) had reached a degree of maturity which henceforth enabled it to grasp an ideology as such without the aid of those persuasive portents and

miraculous demonstrations which in the past, as the above verse points out, only too often gave rise to new, grave misconceptions.

72 - See the second paragraph of [7:73](#) and the corresponding note [57]. Although there is absolutely no indication in the Qur'an that the she-camel referred to was of miraculous origin, it was meant to be a test for the people of Thamud (cf. [54:27](#)), and thus a "light-giving portent" (mubsirah).

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Or they did wrong by it.

2245 - Past generations treated Signs and Portents with contempt or rebellion, and brought about their own undoing. It is only Allah's Mercy that gives them Grace for a time and prevents the coming of those Portents and Punishments which would overwhelm them if they were put to their trial at once.

2246 - An example is cited from the story of Thamud. A wonderful She-camel was sent among them as a Portent and a Symbol. In their wickedness they hamstrung her. So instead of her reclaiming them she was a cause of their destruction, as their sin and rebellion were laid bare. For the story of the She-camel and the references to the passages in which she is mentioned, see n. 1044 to vii. 73.

2247 - Signs, Miracles, and Portents are sent by Allah as a warning, to strike terror into the hearts of evil-doers and reclaim them to the right path. I have discussed Fear as a motive for reclaiming certain kinds of hard hearts, in my note 82 to ii. 74. But some hearts are so hard that even this motive does not work. As they have a limited free-will given by Allah, they are to that extent free to choose. But when they actually choose evil, Allah in His infinite Mercy delays their punishment and removes the occasion for their immediate self-destruction by withholding the Signs which might make them transgress all the more and compass their total destruction.

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