

The Blessings of Baqiatollah

“And to Midian (We sent), Shu’aib, their brother. He said: O’ my people! Serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure and weight. Indeed I see that you are fairing well, but I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing day. “O my people! Observe fully the measure and the balance, with justice, and defraud not people of their things, and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption: “Baqiatollah (what remains of Allah’s provision) is better for you if you are believers.... (Holy Qur’an 11:84-86) The Almighty Creator, reminding mankind of the fate that befell the proud people of the once flourishing city of Midian in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula in antiquity for violating the commandments of God and cheating people, draws attention in the last mentioned ayah towards “Baqiatollah”, which is the refuge of all believers. Unfortunately, the Midianites disobeyed God and spread mischief and corruption in the lands for which divine wrath swiftly overtook them.

Twice they were the targets of great catastrophes that wiped out their civilizations for having deviated from the path of “Baqiatollah”; once during the days of Prophet Shu’aib (Jethro of the Mosaic era) and once during the time of Prophet Saleh.

In the early years of the 2nd century AH, Midian (Mada’en Saleh as it is known today), although a mere shadow of its ancient glory, was spared another catastrophe thanks to a timely reminder of one of its senior citizens of the folly of wronging “Baqiatollah” by obeying the tyrannical caliph in Damascus.

Imam Muhammad Baqer (AS), the 5th infallible successor of the Almighty’s Last and Greatest Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), was returning to Madinah from Damascus after release from imprisonment - not the imprisonment he had suffered as a four-year old boy along with his father Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS) and the noble ladies of the Prophet’s household such as his grand aunt Hazrat Zainab (SA) in the aftermath of the heart-rending tragedy of Karbala where he witnessed the ghastly sight of the severance of the head of his grandfather Imam Husain (AS).

Fifty years after Karbala, he suffered another bout of imprisonment in Damascus along with his son Imam Ja’far as-Sadeq (AS) during the days of his eventual assassin, Hesham ibn Abdul-Malik. When Imam Baqer (AS) reformed inmates and made them devout Muslims, the horrified caliph released him but still kept him interned in the Syrian capital. When the 5th Imam convinced the chief Christian hermit of Syria of the truth of Islam resulting in the mass conversion of a sizeable number of Christians, Hesham was further bewildered and sent him back to Madinah but with orders that no town or city on the way should allow entry to the Prophet’s successor.

When the Imam’s entourage neared Midian, they found they had run out of provisions and it was impossible to continue the journey without replenishing the necessary stocks. But the people of Midian, as instructed by the caliph and his agents, shut the gates. At this Imam Muhammad Baqer (AS) climbed the nearby mountain that overlooked the city and recited the ayahs I have mentioned at the beginning of the article. He then emphasized in a loud voice that reverberated throughout the city: Ana wallahe Baqiatollah (By God, I am Baqiatollah). The people were perplexed. They were at their wit’s end. On one hand was the caliph’s orders to have no contact with the Prophet’s successor, while on the other hand, the wrath of God was sure to strike if the decided to curse.

At this moment a very old man came from his house and seeing the Imam atop the mountain told the terrified citizens that he was standing on the same spot that Prophet Saleh had stood in antiquity while warning the Midianites of divine punishment. He said disobeying the caliph’s order maybe considered an act of lawlessness by a regime that in the first place has no authority to rule, but disobeying the “Baqiatollah” is a sure sign of impending doom and ending in the bowels of hell. The people opened the gates and allowed the 5th Imam’s entourage to buy whatever he needed for the journey ahead. It should be said that we are as much indebted to Imam Baqer (AS) as to his father Imam Zain al-Abidin (AS) for holding spreading of Imam Husain’s (AS) mission.