

# The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## ARE STATUES AND IMAGES UNLAWFUL (HARAM)?

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According to the Quran, if one's intention is to worship them - **then, yes.**

### 021.051-052

“And We verily gave Abraham of old his proper course, and We were aware of him, When he said to his father and his folk: **What are these statues (Arabic: Thamatheel) to which ye pay devotion?** “

Note the Arabic word 'Thamatheel' which means statues.

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَٰؤُلَاءِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ

Thamatheel

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Those who are familiar with Quranic narratives, an obvious question arises. If a statue in itself is unlawful (Arabic: haram), then why did Prophet Solomon <sup>(pbuh)</sup> instruct the Jinn under his control to make them as captured in the following verse?

### 034.013

“They made for him what he willed: **synagogues and statues (Arabic: Thamatheel)**, basins like wells and boilers built into the ground. **Give thanks, O House of David! Few of My bondmen are thankful**”

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُونَ مِنْ مَّحْلُوبٍ وَتَمَثِيلٍ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ

Thamatheel

Illustration - Joseph Islam

We note from the two examples above that the same Arabic word 'Thamatheel' (plural of Timthal and derived from its root M-TH-L) has been utilised. Would a Prophet of God (Solomon <sup>(pbuh)</sup>) go against the teachings of the Prophets before him and make statues / images that pleased him when these were forbidden?

Furthermore, it is clear from the verse that these actions were carried under the sanction of God.

The two simple examples above should make it clear that it is not the 'statue' in itself which is unlawful, but **its intended purpose** that determines whether something becomes forbidden or remains lawful.

A counter argument is usually presented by some Muslims that appeal to the differences in 'shariah' or 'laws' of different Prophets. The argument continues with the assertion, that whereas statues were allowed at one time, they became forbidden later.

There is absolutely **no support** from the Quran that any difference in Shariah (law) extends to the making of statues or images. However, it has **always** been forbidden to **worship** statues.

This argument is nothing more than an attempt to reconcile an extant theology which forbids any statues or images **regardless of purpose** and emanates purely from [Islamic secondary sources](#). If the secondary source argument is followed, is one really expected to find plausible, the notion that during Prophet Abraham's <sup>(pbuh)</sup> ministry, statues were forbidden, then became lawful at, or by the time of Prophet Solomon's <sup>(pbuh)</sup> ministry and then were made forbidden again at, or by the time of Prophet Muhammad's <sup>(pbuh)</sup> ministry? Is one truly expected to accept that Divine Shariah (law) is really based on such a trial and error method?

Furthermore, the same essence of religion (Arabic: Deen) was inspired in all the Prophets of God (42:13) and nothing was said to Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> that was not said to the Prophets before him (41:43)

The Quran makes it absolutely clear that it remains the only source which dictates what is lawful and unlawful and the believer is strongly advised not to forbid something which God has made lawful and or vice versa.

#### 005.087

O ye who believe! make not unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you and do not transgress. Indeed God does not love the transgressors.

#### 016.116

And, for what your tongues describe, do not utter the lie, (saying) This is lawful and this is unlawful, in order to forge a lie against God; surely those who forge the lie against God shall not prosper

It is to be noted in the Quran, that even the Prophet was admonished for making unlawful something for which God had given him no warrant. The Prophet had **absolutely no authority** to prohibit anything which God had not sanctioned.

#### 066.001

O Prophet! Why do you ban/prohibit/make unlawful (**Arabic: tuharrimu**) that which God has made lawful (**Arabic: Ahalla**) for you, seeking to please thy wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful

#### 006.114

Say: "Shall I seek for judge other than God? - when He it is Who hath sent unto you the Book, explained in detail." They know full well, to whom We have given the Book, that it hath been sent down from thy Lord in truth. Never be then of those who doubt.

### GUIDANCE FROM THE BIBLE AS TO WHAT PROPHET SOLOMON <sup>(pbuh)</sup> BUILT

If we consult 2 Chronicles 3 10-13 of the Old Testament, we note that the statues (images) were of Cherubim.

#### What is a Cherub?

A Cherub is generally referred to as an angel whose gift is knowledge; usually portrayed as a winged child. However, in classical texts, Cherubs also represented mighty statues of living creatures with many faces such as lions, oxes, eagles and of man. Sometimes they were depicted with feet of a calf or with mighty wings. They would normally be sighted at doorways, but other Cherub figures could also be found within the temple confines.

#### 2 Chronicles 3

**3:1** Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

**3:10** And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image work, and overlaid them with gold. **3:11** And the wings of the cherubims were twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub. **3:12** And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub. **3:13** The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward.

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

- If the Quran claims to be a fully detailed scripture and the only source of law (6:114), then should it not remain the only sole guidance of what makes something forbidden and lawful?
- Does the guidance with regards statues and images not simply extend to other areas such as **paintings**, [singing and music](#) too, where the Quran has not expressly forbidden it?
- Is it not the essence of the Quranic guidance simply not to transgress boundaries? For example and a case in point, speech in itself is not unlawful and has never been considered unlawful, but if used in a profane or unjust manner, does it not then become unlawful? For example, is lying speech not unlawful (22:30)?

### Related Article:

- (1) [Music and Singing](#)

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