

**See also:** ADULTERY AND FORNICATION; AGRICULTURE; BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF ALLAH; BOUNDARIES OF ALLAH; EXPIATION; FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD; JUDGMENT; JUSTICE; LAW; MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; HAJJ; RETALIATION; TAMPERING; TORAH; YAHYĀ, UPON HIM PEACE.

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## ARK

### FULK, SAFĪNA

The large vessel the Prophet Nūḥ (*q.v.*)—upon him peace—built as Divinely instructed and on which he and his family embarked but for his wife and one of their sons, together with pairs (Q 11:40) of the species Allah intended to save from a great flood that destroyed everything else. The Qurʾān uses three words to refer to the Ark, all of which mean “ship”: *fulk* (seven times, in Q 7:64; 10:73; 11:37-38; 23:27-28; 26:119), *safīna* (once, in Q 29:15), and *jāriya* (once, in Q 69:11, pl. *jawārī*, cf. Q 42:32 and 55:24), respectively from the stems *f-l-k* which denotes circularity (*dawarān*), “whence a ship is called *fulk*, because it circles in the water with the greatest ease” (Rāzī, *sub* Q 2:164); *s-f-n* “which denotes peeling, because it is as if a ship (*safīna*) peels the water (*tasfīnu al-māʾ*)” (Ibn Durayd, *Jamhara*, *sub* *s-f-n*); and *j-r-y*, which denotes “rapid flow” (Rāghib, *sub* *j-r-y*). A fourth expression alludes to the ark as a thing of planks and nails (*dhāti alwāḥin wa-dusur*) (Q 54:13) (see SHIPS, BOATS, AND SAILING).

The story is told in the following verses of Sūrat Hūd:

*And he was building the ship (fulk), and every time the chieftains of his people passed him they mocked him. He said: “You may mock us, yet we shall indeed mock you just as you mock us now, and you shall know to whom a confounding punishment will come, and upon whom a lasting doom will fall.” Until, when Our command came, and the earth’s surface (tannūr) was flooded, We said, “Embark in it two of every kind, and your family—except for him against whom the word has already been spoken—and whoever believes.” And there were but few besides him who believed. And he said: “Embark therein! In the name of Allah be its course and its mooring. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.” So it ran, carrying them amid waves like mountains; and Nūḥ called to his son, who was standing apart, “Embark with us,*

*my son, and be not with the unbelievers!” He said, “I will take refuge in a mountain, that shall save me from the water.” He replied, “Today there is no savior from Allah’s command but for him on whom He has mercy!” And the waves came between them, and he was among those drowned. And it was said, “Earth, swallow your waters! Heaven, abate!” And the waters subsided, the affair was accomplished, and the ark settled on [Mount] Jūdīyy, and it was said, “Away with the evildoing folk!”*

Q 11:38-44

The last verse (*and it was said...*) is a particularly striking instance of the inimitable Qurʾānic diction by which Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ al-Qayrawānī (d. 654/1256) found “no less than twenty tropes of rhetoric in a verse of only seventeen words” in his *Badīʿ al-Qurʾān* (cf. Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 58, *Fī badāʾiʿ al-Qurʾān*; Ālūsī, *sub* Q 11:44), and is therefore highlighted in books of exegesis and stylistics (see INIMITABILITY OF THE QURʾĀN).

“The vast majority concur that the ark resembled today’s ships, similar to a bird’s thorax (*juʾjuʾ al-tāʾir*). According to some books it was square-shaped, tall toward the sky, large-bottomed, narrow-topped, with an open roof for ventilation and breathing, as its purpose was only to keep [the occupants] safe until all the water had come down, not to sail toward any specific destination; yet it had a course and a mooring, and Allah knows best how, and everything is possible” (Ibn ʿAṭīyya, *sub* Q 54:13). As for the design of the ark, the commentaries convey from Ibn ʿAbbās (3BH-68/619-688), al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), Qatāda (d. 117/735), and ʿIkrima (d. 107/725), as did the Israelite sources before them, the dimensions of a three-storeyed teak structure 300 cubits in length, 50 in width, and 30 in height—“corresponding approximately to 440×73×44 feet and yielding a displacement of about 43,000 tons” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2:469)—which Nūḥ took two years to build. The first floor housed wild and domesticated animals; the second human beings, namely Nūḥ, his wife, their three sons Sām, Ḥām, and Yāfith, and other men and women, totalling between eight and seventy-eight; and the third birds (cf. *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Zamakhsharī, Qurṭubī, Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q 11:40)—all of which details al-Ālūsī (1217-1270/1802-1854) mentions only to denounce them as superfluous, unreliable, and unsupported by the science of exegesis, which must be based upon the Qurʾān and the authentic Sunna (*Rūḥ*, *sub* Q 11:38).

### The Ark as a Universal Sign