SAMPLE

Bilqis: The Guided Queen

Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, in the Quran

Aira Aurora

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Introduction

Bilqis — the Queen of Sheba — is one of the most fascinating figures in the Quran. She is the only woman described in the Quran as ruling a kingdom. She is a queen who governed a prosperous nation, who consulted her advisors, who received a letter from a prophet, who tested the truth of his message, who traveled to meet him, who was tested herself, and who, in the end, submitted to Allah alongside the prophet Sulayman.

Her story is told in Surah An-Naml (27:20-44), one of the most detailed narrative passages in the Quran. Unlike many Quranic figures who are mentioned in passing, Bilqis is given a full narrative arc — a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The Quran describes her kingdom, her throne, her council, her correspondence with Sulayman, her journey, her test, and her submission. She is, in the Quranic narrative, a complete character — a woman of intelligence, power, wisdom, and ultimately faith.

This book is the fourth in The Honored Ones sub-series. The first three books explored Maryam (purity and trust), Asiya (faith under tyranny), and Hajar (perseverance and effort). This book explores Bilqis — the model of guided leadership. Bilqis is a woman who had power and used it wisely. She was a queen who consulted her advisors, considered her options, and made decisions based on reason and evidence. And when the truth came to her — through a letter, through a prophet, through a series of tests — she recognized it, accepted it, and submitted. Her story is the Quran's most powerful statement about the compatibility of leadership and faith, of power and submission, of intelligence and guidance.

Bilqis's story is also the Quran's most detailed portrait of a woman in a position of authority. She is not a mother, a wife, or a daughter — she is a ruler. She governs a nation, commands an army, receives tribute, and makes strategic decisions. And the Quran does not criticize her for being a woman in power; it portrays her as a competent, wise, and ultimately guided leader. This is significant in the context of the Quran's broader teaching about gender and leadership — Bilqis is the Quran's case study of a woman who ruled well.

Chapter 1: The Queen of Sheba — Bilqis in the Quran

The Quran introduces Bilqis through the report of a bird — the hoopoe (hudhud) — who brings news of her kingdom to the prophet Sulayman.

The Hoopoe's Report

The Quran says: "[Sulayman] said: I will surely take account of it [the hoopoe], or I will surely punish it with a severe punishment, or I will certainly slaughter it, unless it brings me a clear authority." (27:21). The hoopoe, who had been absent without permission, returns with news: "I have come to know something you do not know, and I have brought you from Sheba a sure news. Indeed, I found a woman ruling them, and she has been given [of all] things, and she has a great throne. I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Shaytan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from the way [of truth], so they are not guided" (27:22-24).

This report is the Quran's introduction to Bilqis. Three facts are established immediately: she is a woman ruling a kingdom, she has been given everything (wealth, power, resources), and she and her people worship the sun instead of Allah. The report is concise but comprehensive — it establishes Bilqis's power, her prosperity, and her spiritual condition.

The Name Bilqis

The Quran does not name the Queen of Sheba. It refers to her as "a woman ruling them" (27:23) — the queen of a people whose identity is given as Sheba (Saba'). The name "Bilqis" comes from Islamic tradition and the Hadith, not from the Quran. The name is widely used in Islamic culture and scholarship, and it is the name by which the Queen of Sheba is known throughout the Muslim world. This book uses the name "Bilqis" for clarity, while recognizing that the Quran itself does not name her.

The absence of a name in the Quran is consistent with the Quran's treatment of several figures whose stories are told but whose names are not given — the believer of Pharaoh's household (40:28), the companion of Musa (18:60-82), and others. The Quran's focus is not on the name but on the story, not on the identity but on the character, not on the label but on the lesson. Bilqis's story is told not because of who she is but because of what she does — how she rules, how she responds to the truth, and how she submits.

The Kingdom of Sheba

Sheba (Saba') was an ancient kingdom in the region of modern-day Yemen. The Quran mentions Sheba in another context: "There was for [the people of] Saba' a sign in their dwelling place — two gardens, on the right and on the left. Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land and a forgiving Lord" (34:15). The kingdom of Sheba was known for its prosperity — its gardens, its wealth, its strategic location on the trade routes between Africa, Arabia, and India.

The hoopoe's report that Bilqis "has been given [of all] things" (27:23) is consistent with the Quran's description of Sheba as a prosperous land. Bilqis ruled a wealthy kingdom with abundant resources. Her prosperity was not merely personal — it was national. She governed a people who were prosperous, and the prosperity was part of the divine blessing on the land — "a good land and a forgiving Lord" (34:15).

The Quran's Narrative Style in the Story of Bilqis

The Quran's telling of Bilqis's story is unusual in its detail and structure. Most Quranic narratives are brief — a few verses, a summary, a moral. The story of Bilqis, by contrast, spans twenty-five verses (27:20-44) and includes dialogue, description, plot development, and character development. It is one of the most extended narrative passages in the Quran.

The narrative style is significant because it reflects the importance of the story. The Quran does not elaborate unnecessarily; when it gives detail, the detail matters. The detail in the story of Bilqis — the hoopoe's report, the letter's exact wording, the council's response, the gift, the rejection, the throne, the glass floor — each detail is a teaching. The story is not told for entertainment but for instruction, and every element of the narrative carries a lesson.

The narrative also gives Bilqis a depth of character that is rare in the Quran. She is not merely a name or a type; she is a fully realized figure with a distinct voice, a distinct approach to leadership, and a distinct spiritual journey. The Quran allows her to speak — to her council, to herself, and to Sulayman — and through her speech, the reader sees her intelligence, her caution, her wisdom, and ultimately her faith. The Quran's narrative method — allowing Bilqis to speak for herself — is a form of respect: the respect that the text gives to a character by letting her tell her own story.

The Contrast Between Bilqis and Pharaoh

Bilqis, as a ruler, is the Quran's positive counterpart to Pharaoh. Both are rulers. Both have power. Both govern nations. But the contrast is total. Pharaoh claims divinity; Bilqis does not. Pharaoh enslaves; Bilqis consults. Pharaoh rejects the messenger; Bilqis accepts him. Pharaoh destroys; Bilqis

preserves. Pharaoh's power leads to his drowning; Bilqis's power leads to her submission.

The contrast is the Quran's teaching about the nature of power. Power is not inherently good or evil; it is a tool. The same power that Pharaoh used to oppress, Bilqis used to govern. The same authority that Pharaoh used to claim divinity, Bilqis used to consult her council. The same sovereignty that Pharaoh used to enslave, Bilqis used to send a diplomatic gift. Power is what the powerful make of it. And the Quran's portrait of Bilqis is a proof that power can be exercised with wisdom, justice, and ultimately faith.

The Throne

The hoopoe mentions Bilqis's throne: "she has a great throne" (27:23). The throne is the symbol of her authority — the physical manifestation of her power. The Quran will return to the throne later in the story, when Sulayman tests Bilqis by asking her to identify her throne among others (27:41-42). The throne is not merely furniture; it is the emblem of sovereignty, the seat of judgment, the place from which the queen governs. The Quran's emphasis on the throne — mentioning it in the hoopoe's report, in Sulayman's test, and in the recognition scene — gives the throne a central role in the narrative. It is the object that connects the queen to her kingdom and the prophet to the queen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

The NurOne master series is her primary project -- a multi-sub-series exploration of the Quran covering prophets, people, places, events, lessons, commands, signs, the unseen, the hereafter, and everyday life. Each book is a close reading of the Quranic verses on a specific topic, presented in clear, accessible language.

Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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