SAMPLE

Iram: The Lost City

Iram ( ) إرم in the Quran

Aira Aurora

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This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

The Quran tells the story of a lost city — a city of pillars, of architecture, of power — that was destroyed so completely that it became a byword for transience. The city is Iram — Iram dhat al-'Imad in Arabic, "Iram of the pillars" — and it is mentioned in the Quran in a single, striking passage:

"Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Aad — Iram of the pillars — the like of whom was not created in the land?" (89:6-8).

Iram is the city of 'Aad — the people who were given great strength and great architecture but who used their power for arrogance and their wealth for corruption. The Quran describes them as a people "the like of whom was not created in the land" — a people who were unmatched in their physical power and their architectural achievement, but who were also unmatched in their rejection of the prophet who was sent to them.

The story of Iram is the story of a civilization that was destroyed by the wind. Not by water, as in the flood of Nuh; not by fire, as in the destruction of Sodom; but by wind — a furious, screaming wind that tore through the city for seven nights and eight days, until the people were "as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees" (69:7). The wind is the significance: the people who were the strongest in body were destroyed by the thing they could not see and could not fight — the air that moved around them.

This book — the sixth in the Places in the Qur'an series — covers Iram: its name, its people, its prophet, its rejection, its drought, its wind, its ruins, and its connections to the other sacred places. The book follows the same approach as the first five books — Makkah: The Holy City, Madinah: The City of the Prophet, Al-Quds: The Night Journey, Egypt: The Land of Pharaoh, and Mount Judi: The Resting Place — exploring the place as the Quran presents it.

The Places in the Qur'an series traces the sacred geography of the Quran. The first book explored Makkah — the center of worship. The second book explored Madinah — the center of community. The third book explored Jerusalem — the center of the prophets. The fourth book explored Egypt — the center of trial. The fifth book explored Mount Judi — the center of survival. This sixth book explores Iram — the center of transience. The six places are the six dimensions of the sacred geography: the House, the community, the tradition, the test, the survival, and the transience. The person who understands the six understands that the places where Allah acted are the places that teach — and the city that was destroyed by the wind is the city that teaches the fragility of human power.

Iram is the sixth pillar of the sacred geography — the pillar that teaches that every civilization, no matter how powerful, is temporary before the power of Allah.

Chapter 1: The Name — Iram in the Quran

The Quran mentions Iram by name in Surah al-Fajr:

"Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Aad — Iram of the pillars — the like of whom was not created in the land?" (89:6-8).

The verse is the introduction: the Quran asks the reader to consider — to reflect on what happened to a people who were the most powerful and the most unique. The name is the significance: "Iram of the pillars" is a name that evokes architecture — tall columns, monumental buildings, a city of grandeur. The "pillars" are the identity: the city that was known for its pillars was the city that was known for its architecture. The name is the lesson: the city that was defined by its architecture was the city that was destroyed by the wind. The pillars that defined the city could not protect the city from the command of Allah.

The phrase "Iram of the pillars" (Iram dhat al-'Imad) is a phrase that combines a name with a description. "Iram" is the name of the city; "of the pillars" is the description. The description is the significance: the city that was known for its pillars was the city that was known for its height. The pillars are the metaphor: the people who built tall pillars were the people who built tall arrogance. The pillars are the irony: the city that was built on pillars was the city that was toppled by wind. The pillars are the lesson: the person who builds their civilization on the foundation of power without the foundation of faith is the person whose civilization will be toppled by the first wind.

The Quran says of the people of Iram: "the like of whom was not created in the land" (89:8). The uniqueness is the significance: the people who were unique were the people who were unmatched. The uniqueness is the description: the people who were unmatched in their physical stature and their architectural achievement were the people who had no equal. The uniqueness is the lesson: the people who were the most powerful were the people who were the most destroyed. The power that is not used for faith is the power that is used for destruction — and the power that destroys is the power that is eventually destroyed.

The Quran describes 'Aad as "the ancient" (al-'Ula):

"Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Aad — Iram of the pillars"

(89:6).

The ancientness is the significance: 'Aad was one of the earliest civilizations — a people who lived after the time of Nuh, in the generations that followed the

flood. The ancientness is the lesson: the civilization that was among the first was also among the first to be destroyed. The person who studies the ancient civilizations sees: the people who were the earliest were the people who were the first to forget the God who saved their ancestors from the flood. The ancientness is the reminder: the civilization that is old is not the civilization that is safe; the civilization that is old is the civilization that may have had the most time to forget.

The Quran does not specify the exact location of Iram. Traditionally, 'Aad is associated with the region of southern Arabia — the area of the Empty Quarter (al-Rub' al-Khali), the great desert of the Arabian Peninsula. The setting is the significance: the people who lived in a region that was already dry and challenging were the people who built a powerful civilization in a harsh environment. The setting is the lesson: the people who built in the desert were the people who depended on the resources that Allah provided — the rain, the springs, the trade routes. The people who forgot the Provider and took pride in the provision were the people who lost both the provision and the Provider.

Iram is described as a lost city — a city that was so completely destroyed that it became a legend. The loss is the significance: the city that was "the like of whom was not created in the land" was the city that left no trace — or so little trace that it became the subject of searches and speculation. The loss is the lesson: the civilization that is destroyed by Allah is the civilization that is erased from the earth. The city that was the most impressive was the city that became the most untraceable. The loss is the warning: the person who builds a civilization without faith is the person who builds a civilization that will be erased — and the erasure will be so complete that the civilization will become a story, and the story will become a warning.

The name "Iram" is a name that the Quran chose to preserve — a name that has endured for thousands of years because the Quran mentioned it. The name is the significance: the city that was destroyed is the city that is remembered — not because the people preserved the memory, but because the Quran preserved the name. The name is the lesson: the person who is remembered by Allah is the person whose name endures; the person who is forgotten by Allah is the person whose name disappears. Iram is remembered because the Quran mentioned it; the people of Iram are forgotten because the wind destroyed them. The name that endures is the name that is in the Book that endures.

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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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