SAMPLE

Saba': The People of the Flood

The Story of the People of Sheba in the Quran

Aira Aurora

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Introduction

The Quran tells the stories of nations — peoples who received prophets, rejected or accepted the message, and were destroyed or saved. The first six books in this series covered destroyed nations. The seventh covered Bani Isra'il — a nation chosen and tested. The eighth covered Ashab al-Kahf — a group preserved. This book covers the ninth: Saba' — the people of Sheba.

Saba' is the nation of the two gardens — the people who were given prosperity, abundance, and beauty, and who were destroyed by a flood when they turned away from gratitude. The story of Saba' is the Quran's paradigm of the nation that had everything and lost everything — the people whose blessing became their curse because they did not give thanks.

The Quran says:

"There was for Saba' — in their dwelling place — a sign: 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 two gardens are the blessing — the prosperity that Allah gave to Saba'. The command is the gratitude: "Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him." The gratitude is the condition — the blessing that requires the gratitude is the blessing that can be withdrawn. The withdrawal is the flood — the Sayl al-Arim, the great flood that destroyed the irrigation system and turned the gardens into a wasteland.

The Quran also tells the story of the Queen of Saba' — Bilqis — and her encounter with the prophet Sulayman. The story appears in Surah An-Naml (27:15-44), and it is the story of a ruler who was guided from sun-worship to the worship of Allah. The conversion of Bilqis is the bright side of Saba' — the queen who was led to faith. The flood is the dark side — the nation that was led to ruin. The two stories together form the complete picture of Saba': the nation that had a queen who was guided and a people who were destroyed.

The story of Saba' appears in two surahs: Saba (34:15-21) and An-Naml (27:15-44). The two passages tell different parts of the story — the prosperity and the destruction in Saba, the queen and the prophet in An-Naml. Together, they form the narrative of a nation that was blessed, tested, and divided — the queen who chose faith and the people who chose ingratitude.

This book — Saba': The People of the Flood — follows the same structure as the previous eight, with adjustments for the unique nature of the Saba' narrative: the two gardens, the queen, the hoopoe, the throne, the ingratitude,

the flood, the replacement, the broader narrative, and the reflections. The story of Saba' is the story of the blessing that requires the gratitude — and the lesson is for every nation that has been given much.

Chapter 1: The Two Gardens — The Prosperity of Saba

The Quran describes the prosperity of Saba' with a distinctive phrase:

"There was for Saba' — in their dwelling place — a sign: two gardens, on the right and on the left" (34:15).

The "sign" (ayah) is the framing: the prosperity of Saba' is not merely a historical fact; it is a sign — a proof, an evidence, a lesson. The gardens that flourished on the right and the left are the sign that Allah blessed this nation.

The sign is the prosperity: the land that produces, the water that flows, the trees that bear fruit, the abundance that surrounds. The sign is the mercy: the God who created the earth also filled it with provision for the people.

The two gardens are the symbol. The garden on the right and the garden on the left — the prosperity that extends in every direction, the abundance that surrounds the people. The two gardens are the totality: the nation that had gardens on both sides was the nation that was surrounded by blessing. The two gardens are the completeness: the prosperity that is not partial but total, not on one side but on both. The completeness is the favor — and the favor is the sign.

The Quran follows the description of the gardens with a command:

"Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land and a Forgiving Lord" (34:15).

The command is twofold: eat and be grateful. The eating is the enjoyment — the permission to benefit from the provision. The gratitude is the obligation — the requirement to acknowledge the provider. The two are linked: the eating without the gratitude is the consumption without the acknowledgment. The God who gives the provision also requires the gratitude — and the gratitude is not an extra; it is the condition.

The command reveals the relationship between blessing and gratitude. The blessing is given freely; the gratitude is required. The blessing is the gift; the gratitude is the response. The God who does not need the gratitude still requires it — not for His benefit but for the benefit of the people. The gratitude is the protection: the people who are grateful are the people who remember the source of the blessing, and the remembering is the preservation. The people who are not grateful are the people who forget the source, and the forgetting is the beginning of the loss.

The Quran describes the land as "good" and the Lord as "Forgiving." The description is the characterization: the land that is good produces good — the fruit, the provision, the abundance. The Lord who is Forgiving forgives — the sins, the shortcomings, the failures. The two are connected: the good land is the gift of the Forgiving Lord. The God who forgives also provides; the God who provides also forgives. The combination is the mercy: the people who live in a good land under a Forgiving Lord are the people who have been given everything — material and spiritual, physical and moral.

The "good land" is the physical blessing. The "Forgiving Lord" is the spiritual blessing. The two together are the complete favor — the nation that was given the good earth and the forgiving God was the nation that had the material and the spiritual in balance. The balance is the ideal: the nation that has the provision and the forgiveness, the abundance and the mercy, is the nation that has the complete favor. The complete favor requires the complete gratitude — and the complete gratitude is what Saba' failed to give.

The Quran alludes to the irrigation system that made the gardens possible. The story of Saba' is historically associated with the Marib Dam — the great dam that channeled water to the gardens of Sheba. The dam was the engineering: the human effort that was combined with the divine provision to create the prosperity. The dam is the cooperation: the God who sends the rain and the people who build the dam work together to create the gardens. The cooperation is the principle: the provision of God and the effort of the human are both necessary — the rain without the dam is wasted water, and the dam without the rain is a dry wall.

The irrigation system is the reminder that the prosperity of Saba' was not merely a gift; it was also a responsibility. The people who built the dam were the people who maintained the dam. The people who enjoyed the gardens were the people who kept the water flowing. The maintenance is the gratitude: the people who maintain the source of their blessing are the people who show their gratitude through their effort. The people who enjoy the blessing without maintaining the source are the people who take the blessing for granted — and the taking for granted is the beginning of the loss.

Saba' is the ninth nation in this series — and the nation whose story is most clearly about the relationship between blessing and gratitude. The previous nations were destroyed for rejecting the prophet. Saba' was destroyed for rejecting the gratitude. The difference is the nuance: Saba' did not reject the prophet; they rejected the obligation that came with the blessing. The nation that had the two gardens did not say "we do not believe in God"; they simply did not give thanks. The ingratitude is the rejection — the rejection of the

relationship between the giver and the receiver. The nation that does not give thanks is the nation that has severed the relationship, and the severing is the beginning of the end.

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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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