

The Queen of Sheba – An Introduction

The queen of Sheba is the only woman mentioned in the Quran as a ruler. She is also mentioned in the Bible, just as a queen from the East. In Arabic she is called *ملكة سبأ*. Her actual name was Bilqīs, and she was the daughter of Hudhad b. Sharahil, a descendant of Prophet Nūh *'alayhis-salām*

Sheba is identified as the land of Saba, in present day Yemen. She ruled there for a period of nine years.

Queen Bilqīs was regarded as among the wisest women of her time. She ruled her people with good leadership. She is said to have been concerned for her people's well-being and worked hard for them. Their land was dry and had to be managed well to provide for the needs of the people. Due to good leadership the kingdom of Sheba was a wealthy one.

Her story in the Quran brings out the wise qualities which made her a good ruler. The story has been used to prove the role and active presence of women in society at that time.

Prophet Sulaymān *'alayhis-salām* was informed by hoopoe of the queen and her kingdom and how they worshipped the sun. The Prophet sent her a letter to invite her to submit to One God. She returned the letter with valuable gifts, but the Prophet was not interested in them.

The queen then decided to visit him. Prophet Sulayman arranged for her throne to be brought to him. She was surprised to see it and to see the glass palace she was taken to. The queen then accepted the belief in One God and submitted to Allah *'azza wajall*.

A few points about her story in the Quran:

- 1) The verses of Quran mention her faith but do not emphasize on her gender or condemn the fact that a queen ruled the people. It implicitly praises her qualities.
- 2) The queen rules in a wise and inclusive manner. She did not confront the Prophet and sought the advice of her courtiers before making a decision. The courtiers respect her decision. These verses show good leadership and co-operation in running the kingdom.
- 3) The story of Bilqīs in the Quran focuses on religious diplomacy between the two rulers. Other versions of the story found in the Bible focus more on political diplomacy.

Imam Ali (a) uses the example of the queen of Sheba in a hadith to talk about how people should hope for more from Allah than they actually have hope for. He says:

People should place more hope in Allah for the things which are beyond their hopes, for Musa went out to find fire for his family and returned as a Prophet, the queen of Sheba went out and submitted (to Allah) with Sulayman, and Pharaoh's magicians went out seeking honour for Pharaoh and returned as believers.

Tuhaf al-Uqul, v.2, p.208