

Sūrat al-Naml Verses 29-31

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلْقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتَابٌ كَرِيمٌ

27:29 - She said: O chief! surely an honorable letter has been delivered to me.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

27:30 - Surely it is from Sulaymān, and surely it is in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوا عَلَيَّ وَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ

27:31 – Saying, do not defy me and come to me in submission.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Why did the queen of Sheba say it was an ‘honorable’ letter? What made her think that?
- 2) Did the letter start with the name of Prophet Sulaymān or with the name of Allah?
- 3) Who did the Prophet want them to submit to?
- 4) What are the main points in Prophet Sulaymān’s letter?
- 5) What do these lines from the letter tell us about the tone set in the letter (God-centred, firm, merciful . . .)

Commentary

When the queen of Sheba received the letter from Prophet Sulaymān she went through the contents and realized it was a serious message. She had heard of the Prophet and knew of his large kingdom. She was aware that he was held in high respect and his words carried weight. He would not have written to her unless he wanted to convey an important message. She was unsure of what to do. As was her practice, she decided to consult with her ministers. She called them for a meeting.

She told them she had received an honorable letter. The respect she showed could be because;

- a) It was sent by a person who was well respected.
- b) It began in the name of Allah, so it was a sacred letter.
- c) It had a serious message.
- d) It was stamped with a royal seal (a distinct stamp used to seal letters was an important practice in the past, and showed the distinguished personality of the sender)

Interesting note – Letters in the past were sent with a seal that identified the sender. When the Prophet (s) wanted to send letters to rulers in other parts of the world to invite them to Islam, he was told he should have a distinctive seal. He asked for a ring to be made with the Arabic writing of

‘There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger’. This was then used to stamp the documents that were sent.

Although the people of Sheba were sun worshippers, they believed in Allah as the Lord of all the lords. This was the case with many of the people who worshipped different gods. They were familiar with the name Allah. The queen told her ministers of what the letter conveyed. It is most likely that what she said were not the exact words of the letter. She narrated it or summarized what he had written. The letter had three main points;

- 1) A mention of Allah and His qualities.
- 2) Advice on not being arrogant and resisting good advice and the truth.
- 3) An invitation to submit to Allah.

There was nothing extra or unnecessary. It was focused and to the point. That is how a message should be. When speaking, or writing, the effect is greater when the message is concise and free of unnecessary details.

Lessons

- 1) A good reputation is important in society. The queen attaches importance to the letter partly due to what she knows of Prophet Sulaymān.
- 2) A believer should invite towards Allah when possible with the right etiquette (with regard to circumstances etc. Prophet Sulaymān was a king and could send that message to the queen of Sheba).
- 3) A message should be conveyed in a focused manner for it to have greater impact.

Connecting verses

- 1) Inviting others towards Allah – 3:104, 12:108, 16:125, 41:33

Hadith

Your messenger is the interpreter of your intelligence while your letter is more eloquent in expressing your true self.

Imam Ali (a), Nahjul Balagha, Saying 301

Fortunate is the person who spends [in the way of Allah] his excess wealth and protects his tongue from excess speech.

Imam Ali (a), Mizan al-Hikmah, v.4, p.3350

Connecting topics

- 1) Inviting others towards the truth

<https://www.newmuslimguide.com/en/your-new-life/71>

(Please note that this is not a Shia site)

- 2) Etiquette of speech, or of conveying a message

<https://imam-us.org/the-etiquette-of-speaking>

