

Sūrat al-Naml Verse 33

قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً ۗ وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

27:34 – She said, ‘Indeed kings - when they enter a city, they ruin it and make the noblest of its people low, and thus do they do’

وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَاظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

27:35 – ‘But indeed, I will send to them a gift and see with what [reply] the messengers will return’.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What was Queen Bilqis’ opinion about kings?
- 2) Why did she decide to send a gift?
- 3) Did she agree with what the ministers had hinted in their reply? (they had hinted they were able to fight, but she did not want to do that. She wanted to try other ways first).

Commentary

The queen heard the ministers’ words about their might and ability to fight. She herself did not like the idea of fighting. To counter that, and to tackle the issue with wisdom, she brought up the point that fighting and war can have a lot of negative repercussions for people. The army of a king who is victorious can devastate a city. They could kill people, take some people as prisoners, and ruin homes and families. It was her way of showing them that to fight Prophet Sulaymān was not a good idea. War ravages society and should not be an immediate option.

Bilqis was a queen herself and knew that most worldly rulers only had their own interests at heart. They did not care about others and were keen on expanding their rule and kingdom. In her opinion they would do two things; ruin the city and humiliate the noble people of that city.

She then declared she would test Prophet Sulaymān (a) instead. Was he a king or a Prophet? A well-wisher or an enemy? She would send him a gift of considerable value and see (through her messengers) how he reacted to the gift. Kings have an inclination towards expensive gifts and it is often how they are won over. Getting material gifts is the weak point of a person who is worldly and attached to things. If he showed signs that he was a king, then she would stand up to him. If he was not affected by the gift and did not care for it, and still insisted on his earlier suggestion that they submit to Allah, *azza wa jalla*, then she would know that he truly was a Prophet. She would then be ready to listen to what he had to say and decide accordingly. Queen Bilqis even told her messengers who took the gift to take note of the Prophet’s behaviour and report them to her; his expressions, his manners, the way he interacted with them, etc. That would tell her about his personality.

History has not recorded the exact gift she sent. What we do know is that it consisted of many valuable things like jewellery, horses, and slaves.

Queen Bilqis was testing the invitation of the Prophet. When Prophets invite people towards One God, the onus is on people to determine if what they are saying is the truth. They cannot be stubborn against it when they realize that the Prophet is genuine and has a mission worthy of consideration. The spirit of the da'wah of the Prophets was not to seek greatness or superiority over others. They were not interested in worldly possessions and no-one could bribe them into doing, or not doing, something.

Note that this decision of Queen Bilqis shows that she too was not seeking superiority. She could have decided on war, especially when her ministers were inclined towards it and they had the strength. But she was not thinking of herself or her rule. She wanted to know if what prophet Sulaymān had to say was the truth. Was it something she should think about, for herself and her people? This shows wisdom and selflessness.

Lessons

- 1) War ravages a country.
- 2) There is a difference between a king and a Prophet when it comes to worldly possessions.
- 3) The genuineness of a Prophet, or inviter towards the truth, is a sign of the truth of the message.

Hadith

Success is the result of foresight and resolution, foresight depends upon deep thinking and planning and the most important factor of planning is to keep your secrets to yourself
Imam Ali (a), Nahjul Balagha Saying 48

Connecting topics

- 1) Wisdom

<https://www.al-islam.org/imam-ali-s-first-treatise-islamic-ethics-education-qorbani-lahiji/8-illuminate-your-heart-wisdom>

- 2) Worldliness in Nahjul Balagha

<https://en.shafaqna.com/51460/renunciation-worldliness-sayings-imam-ali-s/>