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Produced by:

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore (UK)

Study 18:

Women in Islam —

9: A woman ruler in the Quran





- The Quran relates, in an instructive manner, the story of the prophet and king Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
- It is first of all stated (27:22) that Solomon was brought information by ‘Hudhud’ about the woman ruler of a neighbouring kingdom. The word ‘Hudhud’ is generally translated as a certain bird (hoopoe or lapwing).
- But in view of the information related to Solomon by ‘Hudhud’, it is likely to have been an intelligence officer of Solomon with that name. If a bird is meant, then it would be a bird who was carrying a message sent by someone. He informed Solomon:



“I have encompassed something you do not have comprehensive knowledge of, and I have come to you from Saba’ with sure information.

I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given all sorts of things and she has a mighty throne.

I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and the devil has made their deeds seem good to them and turned them from the way, so they do not go aright —

so that they do not worship Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you proclaim.”

(27:22–25)



- No objection is raised in this statement that it is wrong and disallowed to have a woman as ruler. What is pointed out as wrong is that she and her people worshipped the sun instead of the One God.
- After being apprised of this, Solomon sent a message to the Queen asking her to come to him without defiance and in submission. She consulted her chiefs. The Quran says:

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي ۗ مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّىٰ تَشْهَدُونِ ﴿٢٣﴾
قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُو الْقُوَّةِ وَأَوْلُوا بِأَسْئِدِيهِ ۗ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾





“She said: Chiefs, advise me in this affair of mine; I never decide an affair until you are in my presence.

They said: We are possessors of strength and possessors of mighty prowess. And the command is yours, so consider what you will command.”

(27:32–33)

- This shows that, like a wise ruler, she consulted her advisors before making any decision. The last sentence indicates that it was she who gave the final orders. The Quran in no way objects to a woman wielding such authority in the country.



- When she came to Solomon, he tried to convince her of the error of sun-worship in a symbolic way. To enter his palace, she was faced with stepping into what looked like an expanse of water. The Quran relates:



قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ سَاقِيهَا ط قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُّمَرَّدٌ مِّنْ قَوَارِيرَ ط
قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ؕ

“It was said to her: Enter the palace. But when she saw it she thought it was a great expanse of water, and prepared herself to meet the difficulty. He said: Surely it is a palace made smooth with glass. She said: My Lord, surely I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.” (27:44)





- Solomon indicated to her that **this glass floor was like the sun** which she worshipped.
- Just like the glass showed the power of the water flowing under it, the sun shows the power of God working behind it.
- Just like she mistook the glass for the water itself, she mistook the sun for God Himself.
- She was not able to tell the difference between the powerless sun and the powerful God Who is controlling it.



- Another way of looking at it is that **just as the glass is invisible, so is God invisible**. Just as the invisible glass is holding and restraining the water in its place, so is God controlling and regulating the great power of the sun. But the sun is all that she can see, and she worships it by mistake.
- When she understood this, she realized and acknowledged her error. Note that she says “I submit ***with Solomon to Allah***”.
- She does ***not submit to Solomon***, but the two together, the man and the woman, submit to Allah.



- The Quran here relates the exact opposite of the Bible.
- In the Bible, it is alleged about Solomon that “his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God” (1 Kings 11:4) and that this made the Lord God angry with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9).
- But the Quran exonerates Solomon of this charge and says that he strongly believed in the oneness of God and preached this message. In this incident, he turned this Queen away from sun-worship to the worship of the One God.



- To close the topic of Islamic teachings about women, we quote the following verses of the Quran which show that Muslim men and women must work together for the betterment of society, and do good deeds, for which they are equally rewarded by Allah:



وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ



حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤١﴾ وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسْكِنٍ طَيِّبَةٍ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ ط وَرِضْوَانٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾



“And **the believers, men and women**, are friends of one another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and give the due charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. As for these, Allah will have mercy on them. Surely Allah is Mighty, Wise.

Allah has promised to **the believers, men and women**, Gardens, in which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode. And greatest of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure. That is the mighty achievement.”

(9:71–72)

END OF STUDY 18

