

The Ancient Kingdom of Israel – An Islamic Perspective (part 1 of 6): Prophet Samuel and King Saul



According to Biblical history^[1], the ancient Kingdom of Israel was ruled over by a succession of Kings. After wandering in the desert for an undetermined length of time, the Children of Israel (Israelites) entered the Promised Land and split into two distinct kingdoms. King David managed to unite the two Kingdoms, while his son Solomon led the children of Israel into a period of prosperity and peace known as the Golden Age. For many readers, it may come as a surprise to learn that Islamic history also contains stories of kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. Muslims believe that David and Solomon are Prophets and as such, they are required to believe in, and love and respect them as part of the creed of Islam. What follows is an account of the Kingdom of Israel from an Islamic perspective^[2].

When Prophet Moses led his people out of bondage in Egypt, he faced severe tests and challenges. After generations under the brutal yoke of the Egyptians, the Children of Israel needed a period of recovery. Their souls had been hardened by the idolatrous practices prevalent in Egypt and this caused a blackness to settle upon their hearts. Although God directed Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land they were prevented from entering until Moses' entire generation had passed away and were replaced by people whose hearts were filled with remembrance of God. Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land and for some time their condition remained pure and their hearts and minds remained focused on pleasing the One God.

Time passed and their moral condition deteriorated, the Israelites began to commit many sins, including the abdominal crime of killing their Prophets. Consequently, God decreed that a tyrannical king who cared little for his people rule them. He shed their blood, treated them with contempt and his aggression involved them in wars with neighbouring countries. During the endless wars, the Israelites carried with them a chest containing relics and treasures from their Prophets Moses and Aaron.

The chest was known as the Ark of the Covenant and the Israelites set such store by it, they even carried into battle. It bought them great peace and filled

them with courage. Their enemies however, believed the chest contained special powers and it filled them with fear. In time, the Philistines overcame that fear, defeated the Israelites, and captured the chest. When the tyrannical king learned that the chest had been captured, he collapsed and died. The children of Israel remained lost, like sheep without a shepherd until God sent Prophet Samuel to guide them back to the true path- to worship One God, without partners, sons, daughters, or rivals.

Appoint for us a King

Disheartened by the loss of their power the Israelites beseeched Prophet Samuel to appoint for them a king. They asked for a strong man to lead them back to power and prosperity but Samuel was wary of their promises and pleas. He feared that their blackened hearts would not allow them to fight for the sake of God. Samuel was a wise man and he prayed that God direct him to a man suitable to be the King of the Israelites. God chose Saul (Talut) to be the King and informed Prophet Samuel that he would recognise this pious young man.

Saul was a tall, well-built young man who worked with his father on a farm. One day when some donkeys wandered away from the farm Saul and a servant went in search of them. The search led them into Prophet Samuel's town. Saul was a wise man who took his servants advice and approached Prophet Samuel about the loss of the donkeys. Samuel recognised him immediately as the future king and assured Saul that the donkeys were already being returned to his father. Prophet Samuel informed Saul that God had chosen him to be the King of the children of Israel.

Saul was shocked and amazed, he immediately responded by saying that he was not worthy of such an honour because he was from the tribe of Benjamin, a lowly tribe that most Israelites considered unworthy for such greatness. Prophet Samuel explained that this was of no consequence since God had already decreed that Saul be the King. Samuel presented Saul to the Israelites saying , **“Indeed God has appointed Saul (Talut) as a king over you.”** (Quran 2:247)

The children of Israel's immediate reaction was to complain. Even though they had begged God for mercy and deliverance from oppression, they responded contemptuously towards both the pious young man, whose heart was filled with love for the One God, and Prophet Samuel. They said, **“How can he be a king over us when we are better fitted than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth.”** (Quran 2:247)

The Israelites' hearts had once again become hardened and diseased. They were concerned with wealth and status rather than piety, and found fault with God's chosen leader. Although Saul had neither wealth nor status, God had blessed him with knowledge and stature. Prophet Samuel tried to reason with them. He said, **“Verily, God has chosen him above you and has increased**

him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And God grants His Kingdom to whom He wills.” (Quran 2:247) However the Israelites continued to complain and object asking for a sign from God that Saul was indeed fit to be their king.

God, in His infinite mercy and wisdom, decided to provide the Israelites with the sign (or miracle) they demanded. God instructed the angels to return the Ark of the Covenant that had been captured by the Philistines. God not only returned their beloved wooden chest, filled with the relics of the past but He added tranquillity to its contents.

“And their Prophet (Samuel) said to them: Verily! The sign of His Kingdom is that there shall come to you a wooden box, wherein is *Sakinah* (peace and reassurance) from your Lord and a remnant of that which Moses and Aaron left behind, carried by the angels. Verily, in this is a sign for you if you are indeed believers.” (Quran.2:248)

Saul was officially appointed King. He established and prepared an army in order to take back the lands stolen from the children of Israel. However, Saul insisted that his army only comprise of courageous and pious men. The men under Saul’s command would be those whose hearts were filled with love for the One True God.

Footnotes:

[1] (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook06.html#The%20National%20Monarchy>)

[2] Based on the work of Ibn Kathir, Stories of the Prophets.

(part 2 of 6): Saul Recruits an Army

Prophet Samuel informed the Children of Israel (Israelites) that the pious young man known as Saul would be their king and leader. As was the way of the Children of Israel at the time, they complained, and asked for a sign from God. God, in His infinite wisdom granted them a sign that was unmistakable. The angels returned the Ark of the Covenant, captured by the Philistines, to the Children of Israel. With hearts full of peace, the Israelites accepted Saul as their King.

Saul however, recognised that the Israelites were a people who had strayed very far from piety and goodness. Some time passed and Saul decided to form an army, in order to reclaim the lands and homes conquered by the Philistines. Saul needed to be confident that his fighters were pure of heart and focused on fighting bravely for the sake of God, so he decided to take the men who had

volunteered through a series of tests. He was not looking for large numbers of fighting men; rather he wanted pious, courageous men who would be able to face trial and hardship, without complaint, or lack of faith.

The scholars of Islamic history estimate that Saul's army comprised of 80,000 men. It is however important to understand that Saul was not interested in strength of numbers, he was looking for strength of heart, and patience. He ordered that only men free from responsibilities should join. Those engaged in building homes, those about to be married and those preoccupied with business were ordered not to join. King Saul tested his army by marching them through the desert until they were exhausted and extremely thirsty. When they reached a river and saw water in front of their eyes, Saul said to them, *do not drink*. He informed them that whoever drank from the river would no longer be part of the army.

“Then when Saul set out with the army, he said: "Verily! God will try you by a river. So whoever drinks thereof, he is not of me, and whoever tastes it not, he is of me, except him who takes (thereof) in the hollow of his hand.” Yet, they drank thereof, all, except a few of them.” (Quran 2:249)

King Saul instructed his men to either, not drink at all, or if necessary to take only one handful. Seventy six thousand men drank from the river; therefore, Saul was left with an army of 4000. Saul was satisfied, he wanted men able to resist temptation, and with strong resolve, even in the face of hardship. Soon however, they faced another severe test. Saul's army sighted the enemy on the other side of the river. They crossed the river and were face to face with the army of the Philistines.

“So when he had crossed it (the river), he (Saul), and those who believed with him, said: "We have no power this day against Goliath and his hosts.” But those who knew with certainty that they were to meet their Lord, said, "How often a small group overcame a mighty host by God's Leave?” And God is with the patient ones.” (Quran 2:249)

The size of Goliath's army filled many of the 4000 with fear. However, those who knew with certainty that they were fighting for the sake of God stood firm, and said to their companions, “How often, in past battles has a small army overcome a larger one, by the permission of God?” Most of Saul's army looked with fear at the army of the Philistines. Many of the soldiers refused to go on. In the end, Saul was left with just over 300 fighters. They had faced a series of tests and out of the original 80,000 only 300 remained.

“And when they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they invoked "Our Lord! Pour forth on us patience and make us victorious over the disbelieving people.” (Quran 2:250)

At that moment, when the small band of comrades faced Goliath, they looked into the distance at the vastness of the army before them, and put their trust in God. They beseeched Him to cover them with patience and to give them victory over the disbelieving people. Saul's army was small, but each man possessed a will of iron. Goliath, the tall, massive leader of the Philistines, marched toward the 300, who now faced yet another test of courage and trust in God.

When the armies stood facing each other, Goliath challenged any soldier from King Saul's army to single combat. Although Saul's men were the best from among the Children of Israel, they looked at Goliath with fear and trepidation. No man was willing to take up the challenge. Saul offered his beautiful daughter in marriage to the man who would take up the offer but still no one stepped forward. Then to everyone's amazement a young man volunteered. The Philistines roared with laughter and even the members of Saul's army shook their heads in disbelief.

King Saul saw that the youth was little more than a child, small in stature and armed only with a slingshot. He called for volunteers again, but not one soldier could match the bravery of the young man. The youth spoke in his own defence, relating that he had, on previous occasions, killed both a lion and a bear while guarding his father's flock of sheep. Saul remembered the tests of patience he had put his army through and saw before him a youth who embodied the fine qualities of courage, patience, and above all, total trust in God. Saul agreed to let David, a youth from the town of Bethlehem, face the giant Goliath in mortal combat.

(part 3 of 6): Prophet David

King Saul took his army through a series of tests in order to assure that his fighting force was made up only of pious yet strong willed men. From an initial recruitment of 80,000, the army that faced Goliath and the Philistines was a mere 300. Goliath challenged any man from King Saul's army to single, mortal combat, but the only volunteer was a small, agile youth named David. [\[1\]](#) When it became clear to King Saul that no other man was willing to volunteer, he gave the young David permission to face the giant Goliath. Goliath roared with laughter at the sight of the small youth, and even Saul's own army looked incredulously at the sight.

King Saul wanted to dress David in armour and supply him with weapons however, the youth refused. He bent down, picked up a handful of pebbles, and put them in the leather pouch he wore over his shoulder. David strode towards Goliath armed with only a sling shot. Saul was worried, but David reassured him by saying that God protected him on previous occasions from attacks by a bear and a lion while he was guarding his father's sheep. David was confident that God would protect him once again, now that he was facing a brutish giant man.

When Goliath set eyes on the lean young man armed only with a small slingshot, he roared with laughter. David calmly took a pebble from his pouch, placed it in his slingshot, and took aim. The pebble flew across the divide between them with the speed and accuracy of a well-aimed arrow. It hit Goliath on the head with great force. The giant man staggered and blood poured from the wound, he did not even have time to unsheathe his sword before he fell to the ground dead. The army behind Goliath gasped in horror mingled with disbelief and turned their backs on the battlefield. Children of Israel surged forward to reclaim the honour lost to the army of Philistines years before.

“So they routed them by God’s Leave and David killed Goliath, and God gave him (David) the kingdom (after the death of Saul and Samuel) and Prophethood, and taught him of that which He willed. And if God did not check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief. But God is full of Bounty to mankind and all that exists.” (Quran 2:251)

Prophet David’s Miraculous Qualities

At the time of fighting Goliath, David was not yet a Prophet, but after the deaths of King Saul and Prophet Samuel, he was endowed with both a kingdom and prophethood. God gave David the wisdom and the knowledge necessary to lead an empire and more importantly to lead his people, the Children of Israel, on the straight path, worshipping One God. God empowered all of His Prophets with attributes indicating their prophethood and Prophet David was given miracles and unique qualities. David was given a beautiful voice. It is said that when he recited from the book of Psalms, (known in Islam as the Zaboor) the creation around David glorified God along with him. One of the unique things about Prophet David was that he understood the language of the animals and the birds.

“Verily, We made the mountains to glorify Our Praises with him (David) in the *afternoon* and *morning*. And (so did) the birds assembled: all with him (David) did turn to God and glorify His Praises.” (Quran 38:18-19)

Prophet David was also given another miracle. Iron would become soft in his hands; He could mould it to whatever shape he desired. Humans of that time had iron but the process of using it and softening it was very difficult. God taught David a new way of making shields and body armour. Before David’s invention of linking iron together in the form of small rings, the soldiers had to wear heavy iron sheets that restricted their movements.

“And We taught him (David) the making of metal coats of mail (for battle), to protect you in your fighting. Are you then grateful?” (Quran 21:80)

David was known for his piety and devotion to worshipping One God, and he fasted every other day. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, is said to have told his companions that, **“The most beloved fasting to God was the fasting of Prophet David, he used to fast alternate days. And the most beloved prayer to God was the prayer of David, he used to sleep the first half of the night, and pray for one third of it and again sleep for a sixth of it.”**^[2]

David was a just and righteous leader who brought peace and prosperity to the Children of Israel. He is thought to have divided his working day into four parts. One for earning a living and rest. Prophet David did not live off the proceeds of his empire. He was a skilled armourer and he made and sold weapons to support himself and his family. The second part of the day was to pray and spend time contemplating the greatness of God. The third part was to deliver his sermons and the final part was devoted to listening to the problems and complaints of his subjects. David also appointed deputies to meet with the people in all corners of his empire.

Prophet David was blessed with a son, Solomon. **“And to David We gave Solomon. How excellent a slave! Verily, he was ever oft returning in repentance (to Us)!” (Quran 38:30)** Both men were known to be just and wise rulers. David carved an Empire for the Children of Israel and Prophet Solomon led them into a Golden Age.

Footnotes:

^[1] From the Stories of the Prophets by Imam Ibn Kathir

^[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

(part 4 of 6): Wisdom

“And God gave him (David) the kingdom and *Al-Hikmah*(Prophethood), and taught him of that which He willed.” (Quran 2:251)



In the tales from the Old Testament, and Biblical history, Prophet Solomon is often referred to as Solomon the wise, however in Islam; all the prophets are known to possess exceptional wisdom. In fact, the Arabic word *hikmah* is sometimes translated as Prophethood when in fact it means all the qualities we

associate with wisdom including good judgement and the ability to run the affairs of people and deal with them justly. God prepares and moulds the character of all His Prophets, however both David, and his son Solomon were known to be exceptionally wise men. Solomon displayed wisdom at an early age and even advised his father, but Prophet David's early adulthood was spent gaining knowledge and life experience.^[1] Gradually God steered the course of their lives. David made mistakes, but he learned from them. The knowledge and wisdom of these two men continues to have an affect on Islamic judgement and counsel.

Although David endured a demanding lifestyle, he always found time for contemplation and prayer. Everyday he would spend time in a secluded area remembering God, praying, and supplicating. David's soldiers guarded the area but one particular day two men appeared out of nowhere. David was shocked and surprised by their presence. He drew back, startled, but the men spoke calmly and reassured David; they explained that they were petitioners seeking judgement.

“And has the news of the litigants reached you? When they climbed over the wall into (his) Mihrâb (a praying place or a private room).When they entered in upon David, he was terrified of them, they said, "Fear not! (We are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, therefore judge between us with truth, and treat us not with injustice, and guide us to the Right Way.” (Quran 38:21-22)

The two men stood before David and one presented his case. David was shocked by what appeared to be an obvious case of the oppression of one person by the other. He swiftly passed judgement and just as swiftly, the two men disappeared. In that moment, David realised that the two men were angels sent by God to test him and that he had failed to pass the test. He fell to the floor and begged God to forgive his rash judgement. David now understood that he had not listened to both sides of the story. He had passed judgement with only half the information he needed. Quran describes David's lack of patience and impulsiveness, and the benefit of turning to God in repentance in the following verses.

“Verily, my brother (in religion) has ninety-nine ewes, while I have (only) one ewe and he says, "Hand it over to me, and he overpowered me in speech.” David said (immediately without listening to the opponent): "He has wronged you in demanding your ewe in addition to his ewes. And, verily, many partners oppress one another, except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and they are few.” And David guessed that We have tried him and he sought Forgiveness of his Lord, and he fell down prostrate and turned (to God) in repentance. Therefore,

we forgave him that, and verily, for him is a near access to us, and a good place of (final) return (Paradise).” (Quran 38:23-25)

David learned valuable lessons from this experience. He learned that in order to make sound judgements one needed to have all the information available. He also learned the significance of recognising sins and mistakes and turning to God for forgiveness. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, told his followers that knowing something was not the same as seeing it.^[2] Meaning that one may have knowledge of something, but not true understanding until he or she has experienced it. God bestowed knowledge upon David, and gave him life experiences designed to mould and shape his character. David learned from his mistake and became a better man.

God sent the angels to teach David about fairness and justice and He rewarded David for his repentance. God granted David *al-hikmah* (prophethood) and appointed him to rule over the Children of Israel with wise judgement, and a soft heart. David recognised his mistake and repented. This changed him, and even today true repentance and fear of God can make us better people.

“O David! Verily! We have placed you as a successor on earth, so judge you between men in truth (and justice) and follow not your desire for it will mislead you from the Path of God. Verily! Those who wander astray from the Path of God (shall) have a severe torment, because they forget the Day of Reckoning.” (Quran 38:26)

David’s son Solomon was intelligent and wise, even as a child. Ibn Kathir, the renowned and respected Islamic scholar and exegete of the 14th century, relates that one day David was sitting, solving the problems of his people when two men, one of whom had a field, presented themselves to him. The owner of the field said: "O Prophet! This man's sheep came to my field at night and ate up the grapes and I have come to ask for compensation." David asked the owner of the sheep, "Is this true?" when he answered yes, David said, "I have decided that you should give him your sheep in exchange for the field. "

Solomon offered a different opinion. He suggested that the owner of the sheep should take the field to cultivate until the grapes grow, while the other man should take the sheep and make use of their wool and milk until his field is repaired. If the grapes grow, and the field returns to its former state, then the field owner should take his field and give back the sheep to their owner. "

David accepted his son’s wise counsel and thus from a young age Solomon earned the title, Solomon the Wise. However, that was not the only title history bestowed on Prophet Solomon. He is also known as Solomon the magnificent. When he took over his father’s Empire, King Solomon led the Children of Israel into a Golden Age.

Footnotes:

[1] Based on the work of Imam Ibn Kathir – the Stories of the Prophets.

[2] *Saheeh Muslim*

(part 5 of 6): Into the Golden Age

The prophets of God were mere human beings but their responsibilities required that they possess exceptional characteristics. Each Prophet was obligated to spread the same message – man’s purpose is to worship One God. **(Quran 51:56)** However, they were also required to implement and uphold the laws of God. In order to make each prophet credible, God granted them miracles, pertinent and understandable to the people to whom they were sent. The miracle that defined Prophet Solomon was his unique kingdom.[1]

Both Prophet David, and his son Solomon were wise and just rulers because God had bestowed upon them knowledge, and good judgement. David established an empire, and Solomon led the children of Israel into a Golden Age. Solomon’s kingdom was like no other that has ever existed, or indeed will exist in the future. God, the best of planners, involved Prophet Solomon in tests and trials designed to mould his character, thus his life was punctuated by events designed to mold knowledge and experience.

God describes Solomon as “*an excellent slave*” because of his sincere repentance. The tests and trials Solomon confronted sometimes led him to commit errors in judgement but he learned from his mistakes. On one occasion Solomon wiled away his time admiring his string of thoroughbred horses until the time for the afternoon prayer had passed. However, when he realised his error, he turned to God with remorse and sadness, and begged for forgiveness.

“And to David We gave Solomon. How excellent a slave! Verily, he was ever oft returning in repentance (to Us)! When there were displayed before him, in the afternoon, well-trained horses of the highest breed. He said, “Alas! I did love these horses instead of remembering my Lord until the time for prayer was over, and (the sun) had hidden in the veil (of night). Then he said “Bring them (horses) back to me.” Then he began to pass his hand over their legs and their necks (till the end of the display). And, indeed, We did try Solomon...” (Quran 38:30-34)

Upon the death of Prophet David, Solomon inherited both the prophethood and the empire. Due to his high level of wisdom, Solomon was acutely aware of the power of God. He recognised that God was responsible for any condition he found himself in, whether easy or difficult, and he praised God for it. He said, **“All praise and thanks is due to God” (Quran 27: 15)**. Solomon

understood that no power or strength would be his, unless he requested it from God. Therefore, he turned to God and asked for a kingdom that would never be surpassed. God granted his request. He bestowed upon Solomon many abilities, and they assisted him in establishing a magnificent kingdom.

“He said, “My Lord! Forgive me, and bestow upon me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me. Verily, You are the Bestower.”

So, We subjected to him the wind, it blew gently to his order whithersoever he willed, and also the devils from the jinns including every kind of builder and diver, and also other bound in fetters. (Saying of God to Solomon): “This is Our gift, so spend you or withhold, no account will be asked.” And verily, he enjoyed a near access to Us, and a good final return Paradise.” (Quran 38:35-40)

Prophet Solomon was able to use and control the wind by the will of God. He could travel vast distances in a short amount of time. Furthermore, Solomon was able to control the devils from among the jinn,^[21] whom worked for him constructing buildings, mining metals, diving for treasures and generally securing the infrastructure of Solomon’s kingdom. God also gave Solomon a fountain flowing with molten brass. Just as his father David was given the gift of being able to mould iron, Solomon was able to mould and bend brass into tools, armoury, and utensils.

“And to Solomon We subjected the wind strongly raging, running by his command towards the land, which We had blessed. And of everything, We are the All-Knower. And of the devils from the jinn were some who dived for him, and did other work besides that; and it was We who guarded them.” (Quran 21:81-82)

“And We caused a fount of molten brass to flow for him, and there were jinns that worked in front of him by the Leave of his Lord, and whosoever of them turned aside from Our Command, We shall cause him to taste of the torment of the blazing Fire. They worked for him what he desired, (making) high rooms, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and (making) cauldrons fixed (in their places). “Work you, O family of David, with thanks!” But few of My slaves are grateful.” (Quran 34:12-13)

Prophet Solomon was a King of great renown. His Kingdom was unique and his Empire represented a golden age for the Children of Israel. He ruled with wisdom and justice, and acknowledged that all power and strength were from God alone. King Solomon however was not the only mighty ruler in the

area. In the land now known as Yemen but once known as Sheba, lived a Queen named Bilqis.

Footnotes:

[1] Based on the work of Imam Ibn Kathir. The Stories of the Prophets.

[2] Jinn are beings created by God, from smokeless fire, before the creation of humankind. Some are good and some are evil, some are Muslim, and some are not.

(part 6 of 6): Kingship and Prophethood

The story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is the final part in a series of articles about the Ancient Kingdom of Israel. Many people may have been intrigued by the fact that the characters and stories are similar to those contained in Biblical texts and history. However, the Islamic perspective differs in some fundamental ways.

Solomon was both a prophet and a king. His mission as a Prophet of God was to spread the message that God is One, without partner or similitude. He also upheld the laws of God,. As king, he led the Children of Israel into a golden age of wealth and prosperity.

Solomon's kingdom and army were beyond compare. His army consisted of battalions of men, troops of jinn (creations from fire) and even squadrons of birds. Solomon was able to communicate with birds, control the jinn, and command the respect and loyalty of men. He marched with the immense army, believed to number in the hundreds of thousands, across his empire.

The Mosque in Jerusalem

Muslims believe that Masjid al Aqsa (the Holy Mosque in Jerusalem) was rebuilt or expanded by King Solomon. According to Islamic history, Prophet Jacob, built Masjid al Aqsa approximately 40 years after his grandfather Prophet Abraham built the House of God in Mecca. Islam totally rejects the notion that King Solomon built a temple on the Masjid al Aqsa site, and herein lays one of the basic differences between Jewish and Islamic belief. It is what causes some of the dilemmas that exist in the Holy Land today. Although a Prophet in all three monotheistic religions, small differences about the nature and history of Solomon have, over time, created great divides.

Towards Sheba

After consolidating his kingdom, with Jerusalem as the capital, Solomon and his army marched towards the area known as Sheba. Rain in this area (the Empty Quarter of the Saudi Arabian desert and Yemen) was seasonal; therefore, the people had constructed dams and irrigation networks. The barren

land was transformed into vast gardens and fertile plains. After learning of this lush greenery, Solomon wanted to see the transformation himself.

The battalions marched forward and came to a valley populated by ants. One of the tiny ants saw the huge army approaching and cried out. **“O ants! Enter your dwellings, lest Solomon and his army crush you, while they perceive not.” (Quran 27:18).** Solomon understood the language of the ants and he smiled, pleased that the ant knew that he would not allow the nation of ants to be crushed intentionally. Solomon was grateful to God and thanked him for saving the ant’s lives. He was not a tyrannical King who ruled with an iron fist over his dominion; Solomon treated all of God’s creatures with respect.

After his encounter with the ant, Solomon was inspecting his army and noticed that one particular bird was missing from the ranks. He inquired as to the hoopoe’s whereabouts and was determined to punish the bird for its absence. The hoopoe was a bird able to detect underground waterways and King Solomon was particularly interested in how and why the Sheba plains were lush and fertile. Within a short time the hoopoe returned and addressed King Solomon saying,

“I have grasped (the knowledge of a thing) which you have not grasped and I have come to you from Sheba with true news. I found a woman ruling over them, she has been given all things that could be possessed by any ruler of the earth, and she has a great throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of God, and Satan has made their deeds fair seeming to them, and has barred them from God’s Way, so they have no guidance.” (Quran 27: 22-24)

The Hoopoe worshipped and obeyed God with true submission. The bird explained to King Solomon that although Queen Bilqis’ throne was truly magnificent and a wonder of the age the Owner of the Supreme Throne was God, the Almighty. Solomon addressed the hoopoe saying,

“We shall see whether you speak the truth or you are one of the liars. Go with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them, then draw back from them, and see what answer they return.”

The hoopoe dropped the letter into the Queen’s lap and withdrew, hiding, listening to the exchange between the Queen and her advisors.

“She said, “O chiefs! Verily! Here is a delivered to me a noble letter. Verily! It is from Solomon and verily! It (reads), ‘I begin with the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful; be you not arrogant towards me, but come to me as Muslims (true believers who submit to God with full submission).”

She said, “O chiefs! Advise me in this case of mine. I decide no case till you are present with me.”

They said, “We have great strength, and great ability for war, but it is for you to command; so think over what you will command.”“ (Quran 27:27-33)

Queen Bilqis displayed wisdom, for although she had the ability to engage in a war, she chose instead to send gifts to King Solomon. Solomon returned the gifts explaining that God had already given him everything that he needed. He dealt with Bilqis respectfully but pointed that if she did not cease worshipping the sun he would have no choice but to uproot her kingdom and drive her people from their land. Again, Bilqis displayed wisdom and good judgement.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Rather than taking offense at Solomon’s words and actions, Bilqis decided to visit him and see first hand the wonders her envoys had described to her. Whilst she was travelling, King Solomon ordered one of his jinn to bring him Bilqis’ magnificent throne. It was delivered to him within the flicker of an eye; such was the speed and ability of the jinn. When Bilqis arrived, King Solomon asked her if she recognised the throne before her. With her customary wisdom and diplomacy, she said, “it appeared to be just like my very own”.

After experiencing the wonders of Solomon’s empire Bilqis realised that she was in the presence of a wise and formidable leader, but to her benefit she also realised his status a Prophet of God. Bilqis immediately renounced sun worship and vowed to accept the teaching of God and encourage her people to do the same. The scholars of Islam point out that Bilqis’ innate wisdom led her to the truth.

Solomon’s life was full of wonder and his death was no different. He died sitting on his throne, looking out over his kingdom. The jinn continued to work unabated thinking that their master was watching over them. A tiny ant nibbled at Solomon’s staff until it fell from his hand and his body toppled over, revealing that he had passed away.

“Then when we decreed death for him (Solomon), nothing informed them (jinn) of his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept slowly gnawing away at his stick, so when he fell down.” (Quran 34:12-14).

Jewish and Christian history decries King Solomon as a man known for his excesses. For Muslims, he is a wise and noble man. Islam rejects completely that Prophet Solomon disobeyed the laws of God or that he worshipped idols. He was the son of a prophet who spent his entire life striving to please God. He consolidated his father David’s empire, and led the children of Israel into a golden age. He possessed many talents and his life is one of wonder and

miracles but wisely, he understood that the true and lasting reward was in the hereafter.