

SURAH AS A STORY



Surah Saba

Sheba

The complete journey — the kingdom that forgot to say thank you —
told the way a loving elder shares it with a child



Surah No. 34 • 54 Ayahs • Meccan

NOORANI ILM

nooraniilm.com • free sadaqah jariyah ebook

The Surah at a Glance

*Al-hamdu lillaahil-lazee lahoo maa
fis-samaawaati wa maa fil-ard*

1. All praise to Allah, to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth.

*I'maloo aala Daawooda shukraa; wa
qaleelum-min 'ibaadiyash-shakoor*

13. Work, O family of Dawud, in gratitude. And few of My servants are grateful.

*Maa dallahum 'alaa mawtiheee illaa
daaabbatul-ardi ta'kulu minsa'atah*

14. Nothing indicated to them his death except a creature of the earth eating his staff.

*Kuloo mir-rizqi Rabbikum washkuroo lah;
baldatun tayyibatunw-wa Rabbun Ghafoor*

15. Eat from the provision of your Lord and be grateful to Him — a good land, and a forgiving Lord.

*Wa maaa arsalnaaka illaa kaaaffatal-linnaasi
basheeranw-wa nazeeraa*

28. And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind, as a bringer of good tidings and a warner.



*Qul innamaaa a'izukum biwaahidah; an
taqoomoo lillaahi masnaa wa furaadaa*

46. Say: I advise you of one thing — that you stand for
Allah, in pairs and individually.

Listen to the Arabic recitation of this Surah, ayah by ayah, with the Qari
— free on nooraniilm.com (Read & Recite section).

Praise in Both Worlds

Beta, this surah opens with a praise unlike any other:
'AL-HAMDU LILLAHIL-LAZI LAHU MA FIS-SAMAWATI
WA MA FIL-ARD — ALL PRAISE TO ALLAH, to whom
belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth — WA
LAHUL-HAMDU FIL-AKHIRAH — AND TO HIM IS
PRAISE IN THE HEREAFTER — WA
HUWAL-HAKEEMUL-KHABEER — and He is the Wise,
the Acquainted.'

Beta, notice: praise here AND praise there. He is praised
in this world by those who understand, and He will be
praised in the next by everyone — including those who
denied Him, when the truth becomes undeniable.



'YA'LAMU MA YALIJU FIL-ARDI WA MA YAKHRUJU MINHA — He KNOWS what PENETRATES INTO the earth and what EMERGES from it — WA MA YANZILU MINAS-SAMA'I WA MA YA'RUJU FEEHA — and what DESCENDS from the heaven and what ASCENDS into it.'

Beta, four directions of movement, all recorded: every seed and every drop of rain going down, every shoot and every spring coming up, every decree coming down, every deed and dua going up.

And the deniers said the Hour would never come, and Allah answered with an oath: 'QUL BALA WA RABBEE LA-TA'TIYANNAKUM — say: YES, BY MY LORD, IT WILL SURELY COME TO YOU — 'ALIMIL-GHAYB — the Knower of the unseen — LA YA'ZUBU 'ANHU MITHQALU ZARRATIN FIS-SAMAWATI WA LA FIL-ARDI WA LA ASGHARU MIN ZALIKA WA LA AKBARU ILLA FEE KITABIN MUBEEN — not absent from Him is an ATOM'S WEIGHT within the heavens or the earth, NOR SMALLER THAN THAT NOR GREATER, except that it is in a clear register.'



Beta, 'wa la asgharu min zalik' — nor anything SMALLER than an atom. Fourteen centuries ago, when the atom was considered the smallest thing that could exist, this Book left the door open to whatever lies beneath it.

Work, O Family of Dawud, in Gratitude

The surah then recalls two great kings, beta — and the theme running through both is GRATITUDE.

'WA LAQAD ATAYNA DAWOODA MINNA FADLA — and We certainly gave Dawud from Us BOUNTY — YA JIBALU AWWIBEE MA'AHU WAT-TAYR — O MOUNTAINS, REPEAT (Our praises) WITH HIM, and the BIRDS — WA ALANNA LAHUL-HADEED — and We MADE IRON SOFT for him.'

Beta, iron — the hardest material of that age — became pliable in his hands. 'ANI'MAL SABIGHATIN WA QADDIR FIS-SARD — make full coats of mail and calculate precisely the links.'



And note something important, beta: Dawud (alaihis salam) was a king with a treasury, and yet the Prophet ﷺ told us that Dawud used to eat only from the work of his own hands. Beta, a prophet-king who worked as a craftsman. That is the honour of earning your own living in this deen.

'WA LI-SULAYMANAR-REEHA GHUDUWWUHA SHAHRUN WA RAWAHUHA SHAHR — and to Sulayman the WIND — its morning course a MONTH'S journey and its afternoon course a MONTH'S — WA ASALNA LAHU 'AYNAL-QITR — and We made a spring of MOLTEN COPPER flow for him.'

And the jinn worked before him, making 'MAHAREEBA WA TAMATHEELA WA JIFANIN KAL-JAWABI WA QUDOORIN RASIYAT — elevated chambers, statues, bowls LIKE RESERVOIRS, and cauldrons FIXED IN PLACE.'

And then, beta, comes the command that is the key to this whole surah: 'T'MALOO ALA DAWOODA SHUKRA



— WORK, O FAMILY OF DAWUD, IN GRATITUDE —
WA QALEELUN MIN 'IBADIYASH-SHAKOOR — AND
FEW OF MY SERVANTS ARE GRATEFUL.'

Beta, look at the wording: 'T'MALOO... SHUKRA' —
WORK gratitude. Not 'say' gratitude, not 'feel' gratitude.
DO it.

Because gratitude in this deen is not a feeling in the
chest; it is an action of the limbs. You thank Allah for
eyes by using them on what is halal. You thank Him for
health by praying with it. You thank Him for wealth by
giving from it. You thank Him for knowledge by
teaching it.

And the ayah ends with a sad statistic from the One who
counts: 'few of My servants are grateful.' Beta, it is easy
to be among the many. This ayah is an invitation to be
among the few.

The Termite and the Staff



And now, beta, one of the most extraordinary scenes in the entire Quran — and a lesson in how small we are, delivered through the death of the greatest king who ever lived.

'FA-LAMMA QADAYNA 'ALAYHIL-MAWTA MA DALLAHUM 'ALA MAWTIHI ILLA DABBATUL-ARDI TA'KULU MINSA'ATAH — and when We decreed his DEATH, NOTHING INDICATED TO THEM HIS DEATH EXCEPT A CREATURE OF THE EARTH EATING HIS STAFF.'

Beta, picture it. Sulayman (alaihi salam) died while leaning on his staff, standing. And the jinn, who were labouring at his command, continued working — because he appeared to still be standing, watching them.

For a period, nobody knew. The empire ran, the work continued, the jinn toiled — for a dead king.

And what finally revealed the truth? Not an announcement. Not a physician. A TERMITE, quietly eating through the wooden staff, until it gave way and



he fell.

'FA-LAMMA KHARRA TABAYYANATIL-JINNU AN LAW KANOO YA'LAMOONAL-GHAYBA MA LABITHOO FIL-'AZABIL-MUHEEN — and when he FELL, it became CLEAR TO THE JINN that IF THEY HAD KNOWN THE UNSEEN, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE REMAINED IN HUMILIATING LABOUR.'

Beta, and there is the purpose of the whole episode. In that age, people believed the jinn knew hidden things — they went to soothsayers, they feared them, they credited them with knowledge of the future. And Allah exposed the truth with a single demonstration: these beings could not even tell that the man standing in front of them had died.

Beta, take three lessons from this.

FIRST — nobody knows the unseen except Allah. Not jinn, not soothsayers, not astrologers, not anyone selling you knowledge of your future. The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever goes to a fortune-teller and believes what he



says has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad ﷺ.

SECOND — the fragility of all human power. The greatest kingdom in history, with wind and jinn at its command, was brought down by a small insect eating wood. Beta, whatever you are building, remember what it is standing on.

THIRD — and this one is for you personally, beta. Sulayman (alaihis salam) died **STANDING, LEANING ON HIS STAFF**, in the middle of his work. He was found doing his duty. May Allah let each of us be taken while we are standing at our post — praying, working honestly, serving our families — and not while we are somewhere we would be ashamed to be found.

The People of Saba: Two Gardens

And now, beta, the story that gives the surah its name — and it is the story of a civilisation that had everything.



'LAQAD KANA LI-SABA'IN FEE MASKANIHIM AYAH — there was for SABA in their DWELLING PLACE a SIGN — JANNATANI 'AN YAMEENIN WA SHIMAL — TWO GARDENS, on the RIGHT and on the LEFT.'

Beta, Saba was in Yemen, and their engineering was legendary — they built a great dam that held back the seasonal floods and irrigated their valleys. The result: gardens stretching on both sides, so continuous that a traveller could walk in shade. The historians relate that the land was so fertile and so free of pests that it was famous throughout Arabia.

And Allah's instruction to them was as simple as an instruction can be: 'KULOO MIN RIZQI RABBIKUM WASHKUROO LAH — EAT FROM THE PROVISION OF YOUR LORD AND BE GRATEFUL TO HIM — BALDATUN TAYYIBATUN WA RABBUN GHAFOOR — A GOOD LAND, AND A FORGIVING LORD.'

Beta, look at how little was asked. Eat — enjoy it, it is yours. And say thank you. That is all. And look at the



description of the arrangement: a good land, and a forgiving Lord — meaning even when you slip, He forgives.

'FA-A'RADOO — BUT THEY TURNED AWAY.'

Beta, three words. That is the entire crime of Saba. Not idolatry described in detail, not tyranny — they simply turned away from gratitude.

'FA-ARSALNA 'ALAYHIM SAYLAL-'ARIM — so We sent upon them the FLOOD OF THE DAM — WA BADDALNAHUM BI-JANNATAYHIM JANNATAYNI ZAWATAY UKULIN KHAMTIN WA ATHLIN WA SHAY'IN MIN SIDRIN QALEEL — and We replaced their two gardens with two gardens of BITTER FRUIT, TAMARISK, and something of SPARSE LOTE TREES.'

Beta, the dam burst. The water that had been their blessing became the instrument of their ruin — the same water. And their gardens were replaced with thorny, bitter scrub.



'ZALIKA JAZAYNAHUM BIMA KAFAROO — thus We repaid them for their INGRATITUDE — WA HAL NUJAZI ILLAL-KAFOOR — AND DO WE PUNISH EXCEPT THE UNGRATEFUL?'

Beta, note the word used throughout: 'kafaroo', 'al-kafoor' — from the root that means both to disbelieve and to be UNGRATEFUL. In Arabic, the same root covers both, because they are the same disease at different depths: refusing to acknowledge what you have been given.

And then they made a strange request, beta: 'FA-QALOO RABBANA BA'ID BAYNA ASFARINA — our Lord, LENGTHEN THE DISTANCE BETWEEN OUR JOURNEYS!'

Beta, their trade route ran through connected villages, so short and safe that travel was easy and secure. And they got bored of the ease. They wanted long, difficult, impressive journeys like other merchants had. They asked for their own comfort to be taken away.



'FA-JA'ALNAHUM AHADEETHA WA MAZZAQNAHUM KULLA MUMAZZAQ — so We made them LEGENDS and DISPERSED THEM in total dispersion.'

Beta, 'ahadeeth' — stories. Their whole civilisation became a tale people tell. The Arabs afterwards used their scattering as a proverb: they were dispersed like the people of Saba.

Beta, and here is the lesson to carry home: they were not destroyed for murder or idols alone. The Quran names their crime as turning away from gratitude — and then, worse, asking for their blessings to be made harder.

Ask yourself honestly, beta: do we do this? The peace of our home, which we complain is boring. The stable job we call unexciting. The health we forget to notice. The family who irritate us and whose absence would destroy us. Saba asked Allah to make their easy road harder — and He answered them.

Stand for Allah, in Twos and Alone



The surah then discusses the intercession people imagined, and there is a magnificent scene: 'HATTA IZA FUZZI'A 'AN QULOBIHIM QALOO MAZA QALA RABBUKUM QALUL-HAQQ — until, when TERROR IS REMOVED FROM THEIR HEARTS, they will say: what did your Lord say? They will say: THE TRUTH.' Beta, when Allah speaks, even the angels are overcome, and they ask one another what was said.

And Allah instructs His Messenger ﷺ to ask a simple question: 'QUL MAN YARZUQUKUM MINAS-SAMAWATI WAL-ARD — say: WHO PROVIDES FOR YOU from the heavens and the earth? QULILLAH — SAY: ALLAH.' Beta, He tells him to ask AND answer, because the answer is so obvious that the opponent will not say it aloud.

'WA INNA AW IYYAKUM LA-'ALA HUDAN AW FEE DALALIN MUBEEN — and indeed, WE OR YOU are either upon guidance or in clear error.'



Beta, look at that adab in argument. He does not say 'we are right and you are wrong'. He says: one of us is guided and one is astray — now let us examine it. That is how you talk to someone you actually want to reach.

'WA MA ARSALNAKA ILLA KAFFATAN LIN-NASI BASHEERAN WA NAZEERA — and We have not sent you EXCEPT COMPREHENSIVELY TO ALL MANKIND, as a bringer of good tidings and a warner — WA LAKINNA AKTHARAN-NASI LA YA'LAMOON — but most people do not know.'

Beta, note 'kaffatan lin-nas' — to ALL people. Every prophet before him was sent to his own nation; this one was sent to all of humanity, until the end of time.

And then, beta, comes the ayah that I want you to end this surah with — the single piece of advice the Quran offers:

'QUL INNAMA A'IZUKUM BI-WAHIDAH — SAY: I ADVISE YOU OF ONE THING ONLY — AN TAQOOMOO LILLAHI MATHNA WA FURADA THUMMA



TATAFAKKAROO — THAT YOU STAND FOR ALLAH, IN PAIRS AND INDIVIDUALLY, AND THEN REFLECT.'

Beta, one piece of advice — and this is it. STAND for Allah — 'mathna wa furada', in twos and alone — and then THINK.

Why 'in twos and alone'? Because a crowd does not think, beta. In a large gathering, people follow the mood, the loudest voice, the collective emotion. Truth is found by an individual thinking honestly, or by two people examining something together.

And 'thumma tatafakkaroo' — then REFLECT. That is the whole invitation of this Book to every human being: get away from the crowd's noise, stand up for Allah's sake, and think honestly about this message. The Quran is confident enough to ask only for that.

'MA BI-SAHIBIKUM MIN JINNAH — there is no MADNESS in your companion — IN HUWA ILLA NAZEERUN LAKUM BAYNA YADAY 'AZABIN SHADEED — he is only a warner to you before a severe



punishment.'

'QUL MA SA'ALTUKUM MIN AJRIN FA-HUWA LAKUM — say: whatever payment I might have asked of you — IT IS YOURS — IN AJRIYA ILLA 'ALALLAH — my reward is only from ALLAH.'

And the surah's closing warning: 'QUL JA'AL-HAQQU WA MA YUBDI'UL-BATILU WA MA YU'EED — SAY: THE TRUTH HAS COME, AND FALSEHOOD CAN NEITHER BEGIN ANYTHING NOR REPEAT IT.'

Beta, what a line to end on. Falsehood cannot originate and cannot restore. It has no creative power of its own — it only ever imitates, distorts and borrows. And when truth arrives, it simply has nothing left to do.

What This Surah Teaches Us

1. Not an atom's weight — nor anything smaller — escapes His knowledge.
2. Gratitude is WORK, not a feeling: 'I'maloo ala Dawooda shukra' — and few of His servants are



grateful.

3. Nobody knows the unseen: the jinn could not even tell that a dead man had stopped standing.

4. A termite brought down the greatest kingdom in history — remember what your own building rests on.

5. Saba was ruined for one thing: turning away from gratitude — and then asking for their ease to be made harder.

6. Argue as the Quran does: 'one of us is guided and one is astray — let us look.'

7. The Book's one piece of advice: stand for Allah, in twos or alone, and THEN think — away from the crowd.

Ya Allah, make us of the few who are grateful, take us while we are standing at our post, and let us think honestly for Your sake. Ameen.

— This is a simplified, faithful retelling for understanding, based on the Quran's translation and established tafseer (Ibn Kathir and others). For



deeper study, always read with a qualified teacher. —

Noorani Ilm • nooraniilm.com • Free to share — sadaqah jariyah

