

Exploring the Wisdom of Prophet Sulaiman's Story and the Hoopoe Through the Lens of Wahbah Zuhayli in al-Tafsir al-Munir

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Abstract: The Qur'an uses stories as a medium to convey moral messages for the creation of a virtuous human community. Scholars, such as Wahbah Zuhaylī, interpret these stories and derive various lessons and wisdom from them. In his exegesis al-Munīr, Zuhaylī discusses the "fiqh al-hayah" or lessons that can be learned from the interpreted verses. As a result, this article explores the deeper wisdom within the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird, regarding Zuhayli's al-Munīr exegesis. This research utilizes a library research approach and a descriptive-analytical method. The findings indicate that the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird offers wisdom on leadership values, interpersonal relationships, wisdom, honesty, and humility in acknowledging the knowledge provided by Allah.

Keywords: *Sulaiman; Hudhud; Wahbah Zuhaylī; al-Munīr*

Abstrak: Salah satu media al-Qur'an dalam menyampaikan pesan moral agar terciptanya umat manusia yang memiliki akhlak mulia adalah melalui kisah. Melalui kisah-kisah yang ada dalam al-Qur'an dapat ditarik berbagai pelajaran dan hikmah, yang dapat ditemui salah satunya dalam penafsiran para ulama. Wahbah Zuhaylī dalam al-tafsir al-Munīr kerap menjabarkan mengenai "fiqh al-hayah" ataupun `ibrah yang bisa diambil sebagai pelajaran dari ayat-ayat yang ditafsirkan. Karena itu artikel ini akan mengkaji lebih dalam mengenai hikmah dalam kisah Nabi Sulaiman dengan burung hudhud, mengacu pada al-Tafsīr al-Munīr karya Wahbah Zuhaylī. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kepustakaan (library research), melalui pendekatan deskriptif analitis. Hasil penelusuran menunjukkan bahwa dari kisah Nabi Sulaiman dan burung hudhud dapat ditemukan hikmah mengenai nilai-nilai kepemimpinan, hubungan antar manusia, kebijaksanaan, kejujuran, dan kerendahan hati atas ilmu yang diberikan oleh Allah.

Kata Kunci: *Nabi Sulaiman; Burung hudhud; Wahbah Zuhaylī; al-Munīr*

Introduction

The Quran is a book of guidance for mankind.¹ The guidance within it must be explored through its verses, which cover various themes and discussions. One of the fascinating aspects of the Quran is the inclusion of numerous stories about the Prophets and Messengers. According to one opinion, there are no less than 1,600 verses in the Quran that discuss these stories.² This indicates the significant portion and role of stories in the Quran for humanity, as stated by M. Quraish Shihab, "one of the ways the Quran leads humans to achieve the perfection of their humanity is by presenting various factual and symbolic stories."³

The delivery of these stories is understood as one of the miracles of the Quran, wherein its teachings are presented in a highly varied manner and modified into interesting narrative forms. These stories serve as one of the media through which the Quran delivers moral messages for the formation of a noble-charactered human being, exemplified by and being the reason for the sending of Prophet Muhammad.⁴

Although the Quran contains many stories, it does not mean that the Quran is akin to history books or storybooks that present chronological narratives complete with analysis. Darmiyanti, quoting Sayyid Qutb, expresses that the Quran is essentially a book of religious preaching, and the inclusion of stories within it is merely one of the methods the Quran uses to convey its material.⁵

The Quran has its unique way of presenting historical events. In the Quran, the disclosure of historical events is presented with beautiful language. Additionally, humans are urged to strive to uncover and comprehend the messages within it.⁶ Fazlur Rahman even mentions that in every story and its repetition in the Quran, there is always an accompaniment of moral teachings, beliefs, and so forth.⁷ In short, the existence of these

¹Agus Salim Syukran Agus Salim Syukran, "Fungsi Al-Qur'an Bagi Manusia," *Al-I'jaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an, Falsafah Dan Keislaman* 1, no. 2 (2019): 99, <https://doi.org/10.53563/ai.v1i2.21>.

²A Hanafi, *Segi-Segi Kesusastaan Pada Kisah-Kisah Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Husna, 1984).

³M. Quraish Shihab, "Wawasan Al-Qur'an," *Wawasan Al-Qur'an Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, no. November (1996): 9.

⁴Umayyatus Syarifah, "Manhaj Tafsir Dalam Memahami Ayat-Ayat Qur'an Umayyatus Syarifah," *Ulul Albab* 13, no. 2 (2010).

⁵Hani Darmayanti, "Kisah-Kisah Dalam Al-Quran Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan," *Jurnal Ilmiah Edukatif* 5, no. 1 (2019): 58–59.

⁶Ahmad Sulaiman; Aprizal, "Menggali 'Ibrah' Dari Qashash Al - Qur'an Studi Pengantar Dalam Tinjauan Ilmu Al- Qur'an," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Keislaman* 5, no. 02 (2021): 220.

⁷Sulaiman; Aprizal.

stories serves as guidance, advice, wisdom, and lessons that humans must comprehend in living their lives.

One of the intriguing stories in the Quran is the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird (hudhud). This story is depicted by Allah in the form of a dialogue in sūrah al-Naml: 20-28. As is well known, Prophet Sulaiman was granted many advantages by Allah, including the ability to understand the language of birds. He even had an army consisting of jinn and animals, including birds.

The story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird in the Quran begins when Prophet Sulaiman inspected the ranks of birds led by the hoopoe. However, the hoopoe was not found in the positions, causing Prophet Sulaiman to become angry and vow to punish it unless it brought a clear reason for its absence. Shortly thereafter, the hoopoe arrived and provided an explanation for its tardiness, bringing important news to Prophet Sulaiman.⁸ The news brought by the hoopoe was about the existence of the wealthy and powerful kingdom of Sheba, ruled by a woman named Queen Bilqis. She and her people worshipped the sun instead of Allah.

Studies on this story have certainly been conducted in various scientific research. Therefore, the author conducted a literature review to see the extent to which this story has been discussed. In an article written by Muhammad Amin Hasan et al. titled "Kepemimpinan Dalam Kisah Nabi Sulaiman AS dengan Hudhud,"⁹ it was found that Prophet Sulaiman was an ideal and extraordinary leader. He possessed leadership qualities including firmness, high attention, justice, openness, and humility. Furthermore, in the article written by Zulihafnani and Khalil Husaini titled "Kepemimpinan Nabi Sulaiman dalam al-Qur'an,"¹⁰ it was found that the leadership concept in the story of Prophet Sulaiman includes management ability, social responsibility, discipline and firmness, as well as moral integrity that is not easily swayed by material wealth. Lastly, the article by Muhammad Afif Amrulloh and Munirul Ikhwan titled "Stylistic of The Quran: Reading the Story of Sulaiman"¹¹ found that the story of Prophet Sulaiman in

⁸Ahmad Syakir, *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* (Jakarta: Darus Sunnah, 2012).

⁹Muhammad Amin Hasan et al., "Kepemimpinan Dalam Kisah Nabi Sulaiman AS Dengan Hudhud," *Al-Hikmah* 6, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁰Zulihafnani Zulihafnani and Khalil Husaini, "Kepemimpinan Nabi Sulaiman Dalam Al-Qur'an," *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v4i1.13101>.

¹¹Muhammad Afif Amrulloh and Munirul Ikhwan, "Stylistic Of The Qur'an: Reading The Story Of Sulaiman," *Arabiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban* 8, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.15408/a.v8i1.18906>.

Surah Sad contains a high style of language. These findings suggest that the high style of language aims to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad in his preaching. From the review of the above articles, the author has not found a discussion that specifically matches this article.

A deeper investigation into the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe, in the author's opinion indicates that there are messages that need to be uncovered more deeply. As previously explained, the stories in the Quran contain many lessons that humans need to uncover and learn from.¹² The presence of these lessons has certainly been explained in the books of tafsir (Quranic exegesis). One of the primary references in this article is the al-Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah Zuhayli. The reason the author is interested in referring to this tafsir is that in his discussions, Wahbah Zuhayli often elaborates on the "fiqh of life" or the lessons (*ibrah*) that can be drawn from the interpreted verses. These explanations sometimes relate to legal aspects, whether foundational legal principles or their implications, as well as contemporary issues in the section known as "*fiqh al-hayah aw al-ahkam*" (jurisprudence of life or rulings).¹³

Therefore, in this article, the author attempted to delve deeper into the wisdom in the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird. Referring to the al-Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah Zuhayli, the author tried to present the interpretation of the story, then analysed and extracted the explicit or implicit wisdom or *hikmah* from it. Here, wisdom meant the understanding or knowledge that served as a guide in life. It could also be interpreted as the lessons that could be drawn from an event or occurrence.¹⁴

Discussion

Biography of Wahbah Zuhayli and al-Tafsir al-Munir

Wahbah Zuhayli's full name was Wahbah bin Sheikh Mustafa al-Zuhayli Abu Ubadah. He was born on March 6, 1932, AD, corresponding to the year 1353 AH. He was born in the city of Di'r 'Atiyyah, located in the al-Qalamun region, which is part of

¹²Nashruddin Baidan, *Wawasan Baru Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka pelajar, 2016).

¹³Mokhammad Sukron, "Tafsir Wahbah Al-Z Uhaiili Analisis Pendekatan, Metodologi, Dan Corak Tafsir Al-Munir Terhadap Ayat Poligami," *Tajdid: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Kemanusiaan* 2, no. 1 (2018): 266, <https://doi.org/10.52266/tajdid.v2i1.100>.

¹⁴M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi Dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 78, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=sen0knFmgd0C&printsec=frontcover&hl=id#v=onepage&q&f=false>

the al-Nabak province in Damascus, Syria.¹⁵ Since childhood, Wahbah Zuhaylī studied the Quran under the supervision of his mother, and he managed to memorize the Quran in a relatively short time under her guidance.¹⁶

His elementary and secondary education was completed in his hometown. Subsequently, Wahbah Zuhaylī entered college at the Faculty of Sharia and also at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Literature at Damascus University, where he completed both programs in 1952. He then continued his studies at the same faculty at al-Azhar University, Egypt. With outstanding academic achievements, Wahbah Zuhaylī completed his bachelor's degree in 1956. Additionally, he studied law (*'ulūm al-ḥuqūq*) at Ain Shams University, Egypt, and graduated in 1957. He pursued his master's degree and completed it in 1959. In 1963, Wahbah successfully obtained his doctoral degree from the same university.¹⁷ He completed his doctoral program with a concentration in Islamic Law under the guidance of Dr. Muhammad Salam Madkur, graduating Summa Cum Laude.¹⁸ After completing his doctoral education at al-Azhar University, Egypt, Wahbah Zuhaylī entered the field of education as a lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University. Due to his high level of knowledge, it did not take long for him to be appointed as a vice dean of the same faculty.¹⁹

In addition to his role in education, Wahbah Zuhaylī also made significant contributions to society. One of his roles was as the head of the legal advisory board at *Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah al-Maṣrafiyyah al-Islāmiyyah*. He was also a member of Majma' Malaki, heading the Legal Inspection Board at *Syarikat Muḍārabah wa Muqasah al-Islāmiyyah* in Bahrain, and serving as a member of the highest fatwa council in Syria.²⁰ He also played a role in the media, serving as an editorial team member for various journals and magazines, as well as a consultant at various Islamic jurisprudence and

¹⁵Theguh Saumantri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Islam Perspektif Wahbah Al-Zuhayli Dalam Tafsir Al-Munir," *Diya Al-Afkar: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran Dan Al-Hadis* 10, no. 1 (2022): 139, <https://doi.org/10.24235/diyyaafkar.v10i1.10032>.

¹⁶Theguh Saumantri, "Sejarah Pemikiran Wahbah Az-Zuhaylī: Moderasi Dalam Hukum Islam" (UIN Sunan Ampel, 2019), 27, http://digilib.uinsa.ac.id/38090/2/Anfasa_Naufal_Reza_Irsali_A92216062.pdf.

¹⁷Sukron, "Tafsir Wahbah Al-Zuhaylī Analisis Pendekatan, Metodologi, Dan Corak Tafsir Al-Munir Terhadap Ayat Poligami," 263.

¹⁸Fitra Rizal, "Wakaf Non Muslim Dan Wakaf Uang Menurut Pandangan Wahbah Zuhaylī," *Al-Intaj: Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Perbankan Syariah* 5, no. 2 (2019): 176, <https://doi.org/10.29300/aij.v5i2.2059>.

¹⁹Sukron, "Tafsir Wahbah Al-Zuhaylī Analisis Pendekatan, Metodologi, Dan Corak Tafsir Al-Munir Terhadap Ayat Poligami," 263.

²⁰Saumantri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Islam Perspektif Wahbah Al-Zuhayli Dalam Tafsir Al-Munir," 140.

civilization research institutes in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, India, and the United States.²¹

Wahbah Zuhaylī 's most famous tafsir book is known by its full name "*Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-Aqīdah wa al-Syarīah wa al-Manhaj*". The writing process of this tafsīr took approximately five years. It details all the verses of the Quran, starting from sūrah al-Fātihah to sūrah al-Nās, and consists of 16 volumes. Each volume contains 2 parts (*jūz*), making a total of 32 parts (*jūz*). The last two parts contain "*al-Fihrits al-Syāmil*," an alphabetically arranged index. The motive that drove Zuhaylī to write *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* was his deep admiration for the Quran. This is clearly expressed in the preface of his tafsir, where he firmly states that the Quran is the most perfect book and has the potential to inspire in various aspects of life. The Quran is considered a primary reference source that is always rich in information in various fields of knowledge and social sciences. According to Zuhaylī, the Quran has a strong relevance to contemporary needs, including cultural and educational contexts.²²

In terms of the sequence of interpretation, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* starts from sūrah al-Fātihah to sūrah al-Nās, demonstrating the use of the analytical method (*tahlīlī*). As previously explained, Zuhaylī presents his tafsīr with detailed explanations while maintaining the connection between the verses and their reasons for revelation. Additionally, the verses are grouped based on content and theme, aligning with the subject matter of each verse. In explaining the verses, he often refers to relevant verses from other sūrahs, clarifies the main purpose of the sūrah and its verses, and provides guidance to enhance understanding.²³ Thus, the method of writing this tafsīr can be categorized as semi-thematic (*maudū'ī*),²⁴ combining both analytical and thematic approaches. While interpreting the Quran according to the sequence of sūrahs in the Mushaf, Zuhaylī also

²¹Andy Hariyono, "Analisis Metode Tafsir Wahbah Zuhaylī Dalam Kitab Al-Munir," *Al-Dirayah* 1, no. 1 (2018): 20.

²²Wahbah Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munir Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Shari'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, Juz 1 (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 5.

²³Wildan Hidayat, "Modernitas Penafsiran Al-Qur'an (Metodologi Tafsir Al-Munir Karya Wahbah Al-Zuhaylī)," *Jurnal Cross-Border: Journal of International Border Studies, Diplomacy, and International Relations* 6, no. 1 (2023): 293, <https://journal.iaisambas.ac.id/index.php/Cross-Border/article/view/1841>.

²⁴Rifdah Farnidah, "Konsep Munasabah Dalam Al-Qur'an Perspektif Wahbah Az-Zuhaylī," *Nida' Al-Qur'an: Jurnal Kajian Quran Dan Wanita* 20, no. 1 (2022): 12.

assigns themes to each verse based on its content and relates them to the overarching theme of the sūrah.²⁵

In its approach, this tafsīr adopts a combined approach between interpretation based on transmitted riwāyah (*bi al-ma'tsūr*) and interpretation based on reasoning and ijtihad (*bi al-ra'yi*). Wahbah Zuhaylī attempts to merge these two approaches by commenting on the transmitted riwāyah he presents and examining the legal implications contained within them. The riwāyah referenced in his tafsīr is the most authentic (*ṣahīh*) to minimize debates about the quality of the chains of narration among different riwāyah explaining the meanings of the verses. Moreover, in the interpretation based on reasoning and ijtihad, Zuhaylī pays significant attention, especially when explaining the interpretation of a verse. However, this approach still holds an important position in explaining the content of verses related to issues that arise in society, both in legal dimensions and other issues, separate from the literal interpretation of the verses themselves.²⁶

The story of Prophet Sulaiman and the Hoopoe (QS. al-Naml: 20-28)

The story between Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe is immortalized by Allah in sūrah al-Naml: 20-28 in the form of a dialogue. This dialogue occurs after Allah had previously explained that jinn, humans, and birds were subjected to Prophet Sulaiman.²⁷ Allah says in the Quran:

وَتَفَقَّدَ الطَّيْرَ فَقَالَ مَا لِيَ لَا أَرَى الْهَدُودَ ۗ أَمْ كَانِ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ لَأَعَذَّبَنَّكَ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا ۚ أَوْ لَأَذْبَحَنَّهُ أَوْ لِيَأْتِيَنِي بِسُلْطَنٍ مُّبِينٍ فَكَرِهَ عَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ فَقَالَ أَحَطْتُ بِمَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ وَجِدْتُكَ مِنْ سَبَإٍ بِنْتًا يُقِينِ ۖ إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ ۚ وَجَدْتُنَّهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيْنُ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ ۗ أَلَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يُخْرِجُ الْخَبْءَ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُخْفُونَ وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ ۗ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۗ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿۲۰﴾ قَالَ سَدَنظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ ۗ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ۖ إِذْ هَبَّ بِكِتَابِي هَذَا فَأَلْقَاهُ إِلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ فَانظُرْ مَاذَا يَرْجِعُونَ

²⁵Faizah Ali Syibromalisi and Jauhar Azizy, *Membahas Kitab Tafsir Klasik-Modern* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2011).

²⁶Sukron, "Tafsir Wahbah Al-Zuhaylī Analisis Pendekatan, Metodologi, Dan Corak Tafsir Al-Munir Terhadap Ayat Poligami," 265–66.

²⁷Wahbah Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-ʿAqīdah wa al-Syarīʿah wa al-Manhaj*, Jūz 10 (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 311.

“And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe - or is he among the absent? I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him unless he brings me clear authorization." But the hoopoe stayed not long and said, "I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news. Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne. I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] way, so they are not guided, [And] so they do not prostrate to Allah, who brings forth what is hidden within the heavens and the earth and knows what you conceal and what you declare. Allah - there is no deity except Him, Lord of the Great Throne." [Solomon] said, "We will see whether you were truthful or were of the liars. 28. Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them. Then leave them and see what [answer] they will return."

In summary, the above verses narrate an incident where Prophet Sulaiman gathered all his followers, including humans, jinn, and animals, for inspection. After the inspection, it turned out that the hoopoe was absent, which angered Prophet Sulaiman and led him to desire to punish it by slaughtering. Shortly after, the hoopoe came to Prophet Sulaiman explaining the reason for its absence from the mandatory meeting called by Prophet Sulaiman.²⁸

The hoopoe informed Prophet Sulaiman that it had seen a woman named Bilqis, who was the queen of the kingdom of Sheba. Despite Bilqis having a magnificent palace, she did not have faith and did not submit to Allah. Prophet Sulaiman accepted the hoopoe's report, and in response, he commanded it to investigate the matter and deliver a letter to Queen Bilqis. It can be concluded here that the hoopoe, despite being a small creature, possessed sensitivity and attention to events around it.²⁹

Wahbah Zuhayli's Interpretation of the Story of Prophet Sulaiman and the Hoopoe

In verse 20 of Surah al-Naml, Wahbah Zuhayli explains that at that time, Prophet Sulaiman was searching for the hoopoe among his troops. It was previously known that Prophet Sulaiman had been endowed with the ability to understand the language of birds, and Allah had also subjected the wind and other creatures for him. In his astonishment, Prophet Sulaiman said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe? Or is he among those who are absent without permission, and he is not present without a valid reason?"³⁰

²⁸Muhammad Amin Hasan et al., "Kepimpinan Dalam Kisah Nabi Sulaiman As Dengan Hudhud," *Al-Hikmah* 6, no. 2 (2014): 123.

²⁹Hasan et al.

³⁰Zuhayli, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Syar'ah wa al-Manhaj*, 311.

The reason why Prophet Sulaiman was searching for the hoopoe became a subject of discussion among exegetes. Among these reasons, the first is that the hoopoe had the task of informing about land or places containing water by pecking its beak into the ground. Another reason is that the hoopoe also served to guide Prophet Sulaiman and his troops to the nearest water sources when travelling through desert areas.

Due to the hoopoe's absence, Prophet Sulaiman threatened to punish him. Prophet Sulaiman said in surah al Naml: 21:

لَأَعَذِّبَنَّهُ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا أَوْ لَأَذْبَحَنَّهُ أَوْ لِيَأْتِيَنِّي بِسُلْطَنِ مُّبِينٍ

"I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him unless he brings me clear authorization."

In Wahbah Zuhaylī 's explanation, the punishment Prophet Sulaiman intended for the hoopoe was a threat to kill him or to punish him by plucking out his feathers. This meant that the hoopoe needed to provide a clear and valid reason for his absence if he wished to avoid the punishment promised by Prophet Sulaiman.³¹

Shortly thereafter, the hoopoe appeared before Prophet Sulaiman. Wahbah's commentary on this, using the word (مَكْتًا), suggests that this could refer to either the hoopoe or Prophet Sulaiman. Therefore, it implies that Prophet Sulaiman did not wait long when searching for and threatening the hoopoe. When the hoopoe arrived, Prophet Sulaiman asked him about the reason for his absence. The hoopoe then said, "I have gained knowledge of something that you (Prophet Sulaiman) and your army did not know. I bring you reliable news about the city of Sheba, news that is credible and truthful." Regarding the word (سَبَأًا) Wahbah states that the majority of scholars consider it to be the name of a city.³²

Through this dialogue, Wahbah provides his view that the hoopoe is a creature skilled in self-defence through gentle conversation. It also possesses the ability to capture the attention of its interlocutors, ensuring they see and hear its words.³³ The information conveyed by the hoopoe to Prophet Sulaiman serves as evidence that despite being a Prophet endowed with many gifts from Allah, there are still realms of knowledge that he does not possess, but which are held by the small and seemingly insignificant hoopoe.

³¹Zuhaylī, 311.

³²Zuhaylī, 312.

³³Zuhaylī, 312.

Further details about the information provided by the hoopoe are explained in subsequent verses.

Consecutively, verses 23, 24, and 25 elaborate on the information conveyed by the hoopoe bird. Firstly, the hoopoe discovered the mighty kingdom of Saba, ruled by a Queen named Bilqis.³⁴ She possessed a grand throne adorned with gold, various jewels, and pearls. Commenting on this, Wahbah mentions that historical experts provide specifications about Queen Bilqis's palace. It is described as a grand palace with shimmering structures, towering and sturdy, featuring 300 windows facing both east and west. The palace was meticulously designed to capture maximum sunlight in the mornings and evenings. Secondly, the hoopoe informed Sulaiman that the people of Saba, along with their kingdom, did not worship Allah but rather worshipped the sun. The hoopoe also conveyed that Satan had distorted their perceptions, making evil deeds appear attractive and good deeds seem unappealing. As a result, they were misled from the right path of worshipping Allah, thereby falling into deviation and straying from monotheism. Continuing with further information, the hoopoe extended its explanation regarding the unity and power of Allah, understanding that Queen Bilqis's grand throne was insignificant compared to Allah's Throne (*'Arsh*), and so forth.³⁵

In the subsequent verse, commenting on this information from the hoopoe, Prophet Sulaiman said:

قَالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

[Sulaiman] said, "We will see whether you were truthful or were of the liars."

The intent of this verse, according to Wahbah, is Sulaiman's response to the hoopoe's defence and the news it brought about the kingdom of Saba and Queen Bilqis. Implicitly, Sulaiman intended to demand proof of the truthfulness of the hoopoe's words—whether the hoopoe was truthful or lying to save itself from Sulaiman's threat. Wahbah even explains that the change in sentence structure from active verbs to nominal clauses in the verse (the second sentence using a nominal clause) aims to emphasize exaggeration (*mubālaghah*), indicating that lying had become a common and inseparable trait of the hoopoe.³⁶

³⁴Wahbah stated that her name was Bilqis bint Syarahil. Syarahil was his father, who was a great king and was given many pleasures and great power.

³⁵Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-`Aqīdah wa al-Syarī`ah wa al-Manhaj*, 312–14.

³⁶Zuhaylī, 314.

To test the truth of the hoopoe's news, Sulaiman instructed it to deliver a letter addressed to Queen Bilqis. The letter invited Queen Bilqis and her people to embrace faith and surrender to Allah. The hoopoe was tasked with delivering the letter and then stepping back to observe their response to the news.³⁷ By this point, the dialogue between Sulaiman and the hoopoe had concluded.

The Hikmah of the Story of Prophet Sulaiman and the Hoopoe from the Perspective of Wahbah Zuhayli

From the above story, it is evident that there are several lessons to be drawn from the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe from Wahbah Zuhayli's perspective in his commentary as follows:

Firstly, a leader must be able to protect the people under his leadership. This is illustrated by how Prophet Sulaiman inspected his army when they were passing through the valley of ants (as described in verses 18 and 19). Sulaiman's inspection was a form of discipline and attention to his units. Wahbah Zuhayli quotes Imām al-Qurtubī explaining that this event serves as guidance for a leader to assess the conditions of his people and provide protection to them. Just as Prophet Sulaiman demonstrated by paying attention to a small hoopoe, if he cared about such matters, undoubtedly larger issues would receive greater attention. Similarly, `Umar ibn Khattāb, when he said, "If a lamb were to perish on the banks of the Euphrates, I fear Allah would ask me about it,"³⁸ emphasizing a leader's duty to be attentive to the conditions of his people, companions, and immediate family.

Secondly, a leader must listen to his people and grant forgiveness for mistakes. Prophet Sulaiman rescinded the punishment of the hoopoe when it apologized and provided a truthful explanation. This is also exemplified by `Umar ibn Khattāb when he accepted Nu'mān ibn Adi's apology without punishment.³⁹ Furthermore, a leader should test the sincerity of those who seek forgiveness, ensuring that their apology aligns with Sharia law, much like Prophet Sulaiman's test of the hoopoe's truthfulness.

Thirdly, always strive for *tabayyun*. When Prophet Sulaiman found that the hoopoe was not where it should be, he threatened severe punishment unless the hoopoe

³⁷Zuhayli, 314.

³⁸Zuhayli, 314–15.

³⁹Zuhayli, 317.

came with a clear reason. When the hoopoe returned and explained its absence along with the information it had, Prophet Sulaiman did not immediately validate the information nor rush to decide at that moment. Prophet Sulaiman chose to conduct *tabayyun*, which is the effort to investigate the received information thoroughly, seeking evidence of its truthfulness. As Prophet Sulaiman said (سَتَنْظُرُ), meaning "we will examine" or "we will investigate" first to see if the hoopoe had indeed provided accurate information. Prophet Sulaiman even instructed the hoopoe to deliver a letter to Queen Bilqis, as an effort to verify the truthfulness of the news it brought.⁴⁰

Fourthly, the importance of honesty. As mentioned above, when Prophet Sulaiman received an explanation from the hoopoe regarding its absence, he forgave its actions because it had been honest and provided a true reason. The honesty demonstrated by the hoopoe served as a justification for its delay. Moreover, the hoopoe's honesty was evident in its endeavour to gather information about the people of Saba, as explained by Wahbah that Prophet Sulaiman greatly valued such efforts.⁴¹ Thanks to the honesty of the hoopoe, it escaped the severe punishment that Prophet Sulaiman had threatened. This illustrates that honesty fundamentally brings goodness to those who practice it, while falsehood leads its perpetrator into abysses of lowliness and evil.

Fifthly, Allah's knowledge is vast, and He grants it to whom He wills. The vastness of Allah's knowledge, and His granting it to whomever He chooses, is illustrated in the defence and explanation given by the hoopoe for its absence to Prophet Sulaiman. In its explanation, the hoopoe stated that it had conducted a scientific journey and reconnaissance of the land of Saba. It had acquired knowledge about the condition of its people, both in terms of their kingdom and their religion, despite its short absence. The information gathered by the hoopoe was then relayed to Prophet Sulaiman. This incident highlights that despite Allah having bestowed prophethood, wisdom, and extensive knowledge upon Prophet Sulaiman, a small and seemingly insignificant creature like the hoopoe possessed knowledge that he did not. Scholars interpret this as a sign to always remain humble, as Allah's knowledge is vast, and it is His prerogative to bestow it upon whomever He wills. Al-Zamakhshari commented on this event, stating that it serves as evidence against the false belief of the Rafidah, who argue that an Imām knows

⁴⁰M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah (Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Quran)*, Vol. 10 (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2017), 214.

⁴¹Zuhayli, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Syar'ah wa al-Manhaj*, 317.

everything and no one possesses more knowledge than him.⁴² Yet, as evident, even a bird like the hoopoe was granted knowledge and insights that were not known to Prophet Sulaiman at that time.

Conclusion

Several verses narrate the event between Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe bird in sūrah al-Naml: 20-28. This event is recounted in the Quran as a dialogue between the two. It occurred when Prophet Sulaiman was inspecting his troops and did not find the hoopoe among them. Sulaiman vowed to punish it unless it provided a valid reason. The hoopoe then returned and explained its delay, revealing that it had discovered a kingdom ruled by a queen where people worshipped the sun instead of Allah. From the story of Prophet Sulaiman and the hoopoe, several important lessons can be drawn. Firstly, leaders need to protect and care for their people. Secondly, a leader must be able to accept people's reasons and forgive them. Thirdly, verifying the truth of information before making decisions, as Sulaiman did, is crucial. Fourthly, it is important to always uphold honesty. Fifthly, this story highlights that Allah's knowledge is vast and can be bestowed upon anyone. These lessons illustrate the values of leadership, human relations, wisdom, honesty, and humility in the face of knowledge granted by Allah.

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⁴²Zuhaylī, 312.

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