

# Sheba

Isaiah 60 Prayer Initiative



## DAY 1

# Sheba – Wealth, Worship and Witness Will Come to the House of the Lord

*And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense, and proclaiming the praise of the Lord (Isaiah 60:6b).*

There are records of Sheba as a kingdom in Southern Arabia from 1000 BC. At the zenith of its power, it included parts of the modern day Dhofar region of Oman, Yemen, and southern Saudi Arabia (including Najran, Jizan, and Asir). Sheba was famous for trade in gold, jewels, and spices, but it was best known for producing the finest quality frankincense widely used in the ancient world. Through its dominance of frankincense trade routes, Sheba's influence extended far north to the Holy Land and beyond.

In Isaiah 60, the nation of Sheba is mentioned as bringing gifts and worship to the Lord in Jerusalem. The Queen of Sheba already led the way some 250 years before Isaiah's time. She and her great caravans set out on a more than three-month journey (one-way!) to investigate the fame of Solomon personally and to know more about his relationship with the Lord. There

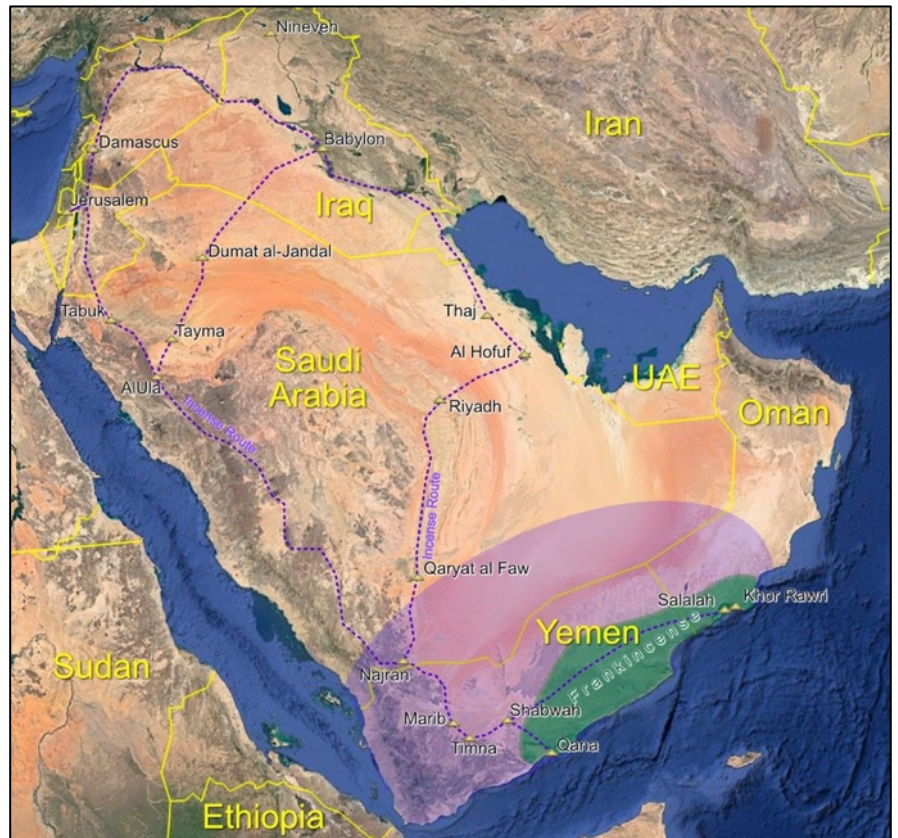


was something she had heard, probably from traders returning from the north, that convinced her to leave her kingdom, face desert dangers and hardships, and seek the wisdom of King Solomon. Her camels were thus laden with large quantities of spices, gold, and precious stones, all as an offering for the king. She had questions, and Solomon was the one to answer them.

At the end of her visit, the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, *I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told to me; you have far exceeded the report I heard* (2 Chronicles 9:6). In time, she returned to Sheba having her questions answered and with a new respect for the God of Israel.

Jesus also honors the Queen of Sheba when He says: *The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here* (Matthew 12:42). Jesus says she is from the "south" and "the ends of the earth"—a good description of southern Arabia.

Isaiah 60:6 describes the amazing visit of the nation of Sheba to Jerusalem in the end times. Again, there will be many camels, bearing gold and incense—just like the Queen of Sheba, but this time it seems they will know the Lord God. Yet in today’s Sheba (southern Oman, Yemen, and southern Saudi Arabia), there are many tribes that still need to know the Lord, so that they are ready in the future to bring their abundant gifts to Him.



Approximate locations of Kingdom of Sheba, covering Yemen, southwest Oman, and southern Saudi Arabia. Frankincense trade routes are in purple.

## Day 1 – Prayer Points

- The Queen of Sheba wanted to know more about the Lord on her visit with Solomon. Pray for an increased hunger from the nation of Sheba to desire the Lord today. We know Sheba will have an amazing future bringing Jesus so much; pray for them to be ready today to be part of His worship team.
- As Jesus said, the Queen of the South (Sheba) came a long way to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Matthew 12:42), but someone greater than Solomon had come, the Messiah. Let us pray that the modern-day people of Sheba in Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia will have their eyes opened to recognize that Someone greater than Solomon is here – Jesus, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the world. May they understand who He is and worship Him.
- Isaiah 60 promises that there will be a procession of worshipers from the Arabian Peninsula. Their procession will include their wealth, incense, worship, and wonderful testimony of praises to God. Pray that the people of Sheba will come bearing wealth, testifying of God’s praises, worshiping Him, and singing joyfully. Pray that God’s promises will come to pass today, and that today will be the beginning of the procession of worship and devotion that will continue to increase until its complete fulfillment.

## DAY 2

### Sheba – An Ancient People of South Arabia

*Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of **Sheba** and Dedan (Genesis 25:1-3a).*

Sheba is the grandson of Abraham and Keturah, his third wife. In Isaiah 60, all the nations listed in verses 6 and 7 are direct descendants of Abraham, so it is likely that this is the Sheba referred to. Sheba is a Hebrew name, which is Seba or Saba in Arabic (سبأ), so the people of Sheba are referred to as Sabeans.

Although some scholars suppose that the Queen of Sheba is from Ethiopia, there is a strong basis for locating Sheba in Southern Arabia. The remains of the palace of the Queen of Sheba may be at an archaeological site in Marib, Yemen. One of the best-preserved buildings in the ruins, the Bar'an Temple (also known as the Throne of Bilqis), may be the ancient palace. Sumharam at Khor Ruri in southern Oman, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is supposedly the summer palace of the Queen of Sheba. It is possible that Yemen, Eritrea, and Ethiopia at one time may have been joined by one ruling power or kingdom; therefore, the kingdom of Sheba may have spanned the Red Sea. Nonetheless, the oldest writings of Sabaean [Sheba] language on rocks comes from Yemen, not Ethiopia. The Sheba of Isaiah also seems linked closely with Oman, Yemen, and Saudi because the other four nations from Isaiah 60 are in the Arabian Peninsula.



Pottery shard written in the Sabaean language that dates to the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, found in

Jerusalem.

When Isaiah was writing these prophecies around 700 BC, the city of Marib, Yemen, was most likely the capital of Sheba. This would have been a central location for the frankincense trade route from south to north. Sana'a is the current capital dating back to the 1st century AD. The Sabaean language is extinct today, but most likely the living language of the Razihi people in northwest Yemen is the closest equivalent to be found.

## Day 2 – Prayer Points

- Let us pray for God’s great purposes for the descendants of Sheba. They are blessed as descendants of Abraham. Let us pray that they can be heirs of the promise to Abraham that *through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed* (Genesis 22:18) by believing in Jesus. May the people of Sheba find their destiny completed in Jesus.
- Like the Arabs in Jerusalem at Pentecost who heard the gospel (Acts 2:11), these descendants can hear the gospel now, become Jesus followers, and be grafted into the tree of believing Israel (Romans 11:17-18) to become a new creation in Christ (Ephesians 2:13-15). Let us pray for this to happen as they hear the gospel from believers in the harvest field, via dreams and visions of Jesus, and via Biblical material on the internet.
- Ask the Lord to begin raising up and multiplying His new followers even now in our day. May He draw worshippers who will give to Him their best: their wealth, their worship and praise, and the testimony of their mouths to glorify Him. May this testimony draw others to Jesus also. May they bow before God and serve Him (Psalm 72:11). May the name of Jesus be proclaimed by them, and thanks and praise to God be in their mouths, beginning from Oman, through Yemen and southern Saudi.
- *See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland* (Isaiah 43:19). The fastest growing church among the local population of the Arabian Peninsula is in Yemen. God is doing something with Jesus’ followers there. Pray for a greater increase of Yemeni believers in Jesus.
- Pray that the people of Sheba—the Muslims living in Oman, Yemen, and Southern Saudi Arabia—recognize that Jesus is much more than a prophet (Matthew 12:42). May they realize that Someone greater than Mohammed is here, and that He is calling them. May they seek Him and be found by Him. May they bring Him their best, their wealth, and their worship. May these new believers become the witnesses proclaiming Him to their nations. May their great awakening impact the whole Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East and North Africa region, causing a great light to shine from Sheba to the rest of the Muslim world.

## DAY 3

### Sheba – Frankincense

*A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from **Sheba** shall come. They shall bring gold and **frankincense**, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord (Isaiah 60:6 NRSVA).*

Frankincense is first mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 30:34. As Israel camped before Mount Sinai, God instructed Moses regarding the way He was to be worshiped. Frankincense was to be one of the ingredients of the incense to be offered before the Lord. The Lord said, *“It shall be most holy for you”* (Exodus 30:36). It helped fill the tabernacle with amazing smells, a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The fabric of the tabernacle tents must have smelled of this incense.

Only "pure frankincense," of the highest quality, was to be offered to the Most High God and, throughout antiquity, it was exported from Southern Arabia. The best of this frankincense comes from the desert plateau that borders the mountains along the coast of the Dhofar region of present-day southern Oman. This area would have been part of the Kingdom of Sheba found in Isaiah 60:6. The historic Frankincense Trail stretched from this area all the way through present-day Yemen and into the vast desert of present-day Saudi Arabia. It then headed north, to kingdoms bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and from there to the rest of the known world.

Frankincense is still used today by many people in the Arabian Peninsula, especially by Yemenis and Omanis. A Yemeni believer in Jesus reflects on frankincense:

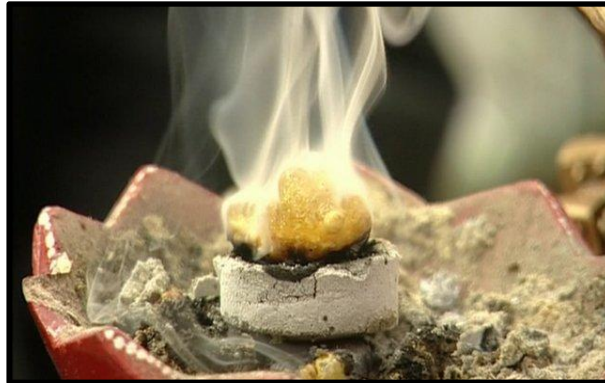
*My name is Bilqis. I am named after the Queen of Sheba. We use incense containing frankincense in our homes, but good quality frankincense is very expensive now. As a child, my mother would burn incense in the house when neighbours and friends came over. This fragrance is so important to us. Some of the ladies would stand around the incense burner and allow the smoke to mix into their clothes, so that the scent would linger on them for a long time.*

*“May my prayer be set before you like incense” (Psalm 141:2). For me, this Scripture comes alive, and I think about praying for my family, friends, and neighbors. Also, may I be like incense before them, may I be a sweet smell of the Lord Jesus.*

*My family (which is mostly Muslim) uses frankincense, and lots of people we know use frankincense on the weekends, especially in ways related to the mosque. Men will use frankincense before going to the mosque. Some mosques will also burn incense. Now, in our Yemeni fellowship of Jesus followers, we will burn incense as we worship together, and it fills the air with this traditional aroma. I now believe that the golden bowls of Revelation 5:8 that are burning incense along with the prayers of the saints have Yemeni frankincense in them. Our prayers are joined with other saints.*

In a coming future’s glorious day, the “pure frankincense” previously offered to the Lord in His tabernacle will be offered to the Lord Jesus Christ as He reigns in Jerusalem. By this gift, the people of Sheba will affirm the deity of the Lord Jesus as they worship Him, giving to Him what

the Lord ordained was to be used in the worship of Himself. The people of Sheba will worship the Lord extravagantly, bringing their precious frankincense to Him as an expression of their love and devotion to their Lord and Savior.



Burning of frankincense

## Day 3 – Prayer Points

- Thank the Lord for the frankincense of Sheba (the Dhofar province in Oman) that was used in His temple to worship Him long ago. Pray that in these days He will raise up the incense of spiritual worshipers in Dhofar and its cities, like Salalah and Khor Rori. Pray for the raising up of talented musicians and composers, ready to glorify Him. Pray that many new psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs will be written by these local believers.
- *“My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 1:11).* Pray that the name of the Lord Almighty will be known in every place where frankincense is burned.
- King Solomon is described as full of the fragrance of incense in Song of Solomon 3:6 (NLT): *Who is this sweeping in from the wilderness like a cloud of smoke? Who is it, fragrant with myrrh and frankincense and every kind of spice?* Let us pray that the peoples of Sheba will be filled with the fragrance of the Lord and that they will know that He is pleased with their worship of the Lord Jesus.
- Pray that more and more Yemeni believers in Jesus will know that they are a fragrance to the Lord before those around them. May they know that they bring a sweet aroma to the lives of those in their homes and those they encounter.
- Pray for Yemeni believers in Jesus, that they will know that their prayers for those around them are like incense, and that they are bringing family and friends into the presence of the Lord Jesus by their prayers.
- Praise God for the way the people of Yemen are seeing that frankincense can be part of their worship unto God.

## DAY 4

### Sheba – Najran, A City on Ancient Paths

*This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it. Therefore hear, you nations; you who are witnesses, observe what will happen to them. Hear, you earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law. What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me'" (Jeremiah 6:16, 18-20).*

From early days, Najran (in southern Saudi Arabia) was Sheba's primary trade link in its northern regions for its overland caravans, being at a crossroads on ancient paths of trade and important frankincense routes. It was the leading gateway city through which Sheba's caravans delivered gold, incense, jewels, and other goods as mentioned in Scripture.

Najran has a long-standing legacy of faith and courage. Historical records indicate that the Gospel had reached there in the early centuries of the church, and that its community of indigenous believers faithfully endured multiple seasons of hardship and persecution. The church of Najran existed from the 5th century AD, or earlier, and lasted until at least the 14th century AD, representing the single largest Christian community in the history of the Arabian Peninsula. Najran's famed resilience was matched by its bold witness. We are even told that this church sent a missionary to China in the 9th century.

In 523 AD, Najran suffered a horrific massacre at the hands of a South-Arabian Jewish king upon refusing to renounce Christ. Well-documented stories of these courageous martyrs were preserved by the church of that day, and many church communities continue to commemorate their faith. In recent years, ancient manuscripts with numerous historical accounts of this event have received much attention from academic scholars.

Thousands of believers who refused to deny Christ were subject to torture by their Jewish persecutors, some one hundred years before the rise of Islam. The leader of the Christian community of Najran at the time, Harith (Arethas), was a beloved and respected elder. The devastating



Orthodox iconography of the martyrdom of St. Arethas



persecution was of men, women and children, slaves and free, clergy and laymen, local Arabs and foreigners. All who called upon the name of the Lord were martyred for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such detailed testimonies of the Najrani believers reveal a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Their testimonies are filled with references to God's Word and with fervent prayers. Many were burned alive, while others were mercilessly dragged behind camels, beheaded, or shot with arrows with their children at their side. In all its diversity, the church of Najran stood together with a spirit of unity and solidarity as it received its heavenly crown of victory.

Despite all this, the Church of Najran persevered, continuing well into the Islamic era. The last traces of a public expression of Christianity can be seen inscribed on 14th-century gravestones.

## Day 4 – Prayer Points

*They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations (Isaiah 61:4).*

- Let us pray that these ancient seeds of faith and prayers in Najran will produce a great harvest for the Kingdom by the life-giving Spirit of God. May the ancient ruins of faith and the church be restored and may the blood of the martyrs bear fruit for eternal life for many in Najran and its region.
- Pray that today the people of Sheba will seek the ancient spiritual paths. May the people of Sheba indeed walk the paths of their spiritual ancestors who followed Jesus (like the Najrani martyrs), listened to His words, and obeyed Him. May they listen to the words of God and embrace His ways; may the incense of their worship become acceptable to the Lord.
- Just as the dry riverbed of Wadi Najran becomes a flowing river in the wilderness after rain, let us ask God to pour out His Holy Spirit on this region, to bring the waters of life in the spiritual desert—not only in Najran, but in the whole territory of ancient Sheba, in Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.

## DAY 5

### Sheba – Blessing the Poor

*This is how you are to bless the [people]. Say to them: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the [people], and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:23-27, adapted).*

This is an account of the plight of modern-day Sheba (Yemen), told by a Yemeni.

*My name is Himyar. My beautiful land of Yemen, my home, and the home of my forefathers, once the prosperous and blessed nation from which the Queen of Sheba traveled to see King Solomon, now has the highest poverty rates in the region. The war and conflict, which began in 2014, has moved my country into extreme hardship and suffering. We, as a people, have a special bond with this land! The land of Sheba is so important to us. Although this is the last thing my sister would think of, she and her family want to leave Yemen because she lost her job and her income; there are no opportunities for her in Yemen anymore. Life is very hard, and it keeps getting harder.*

*There is not enough food for most people to survive, with a large proportion of the population struggling to access sufficient food, and this greatly affects women, children, and the internally displaced persons. People are scavenging in the rubbish to find food. The current situation is so painful.*

*Women have mainly been the ones getting water in the rural areas, clean water has been a challenge. The war has made finding water even harder, as the conflict has damaged infrastructure and disrupted supply systems, leaving many without clean and safe drinking water.*

*Numerous schools have suffered damage or become inoperable, depriving children of access to education. Additionally, a significant number of teachers have not received their wages, compelling them to seek alternative employment, which affected the quality of the education offered. School curricula have also been changed in the areas under the rule of the Houthis. My relative’s child is missing out on school because his parents do not want to send him to government school as they are afraid that their child will be indoctrinated. At the same time, they cannot send him to a private school because they can barely afford to provide food on the table. I know of some other children who cannot go to school because their schools were bombed. This generation of Yemeni children will have very little education.*

*The ongoing conflict has led to a decline in economic activities, including the disruption of trade and reduced agricultural production. In the northern parts of Yemen, most of the government civil employees have not received salaries for many years. These factors have contributed to the poverty crisis. When my own father receives a salary (if he does), it is less than half a month’s salary every four to five months.*



A typical Yemeni family struggling to survive.

## Himyar asks us to use the following blessings to fuel prayer for Yemen. Please add your own blessings as well.

Lord Jesus, in Your Holy Name, we bless Yemen:

**For peace and reconciliation.** Yemen, we bless you in the holy name of Jesus with wholeness. We ask the Holy Spirit to flow between these broken pieces, between the neighbors who are fighting this war, and the people who are not living in peace. May the blessing of the Holy Spirit come into these broken pieces and fix them together so that wholeness and new life can grow from this. We bless you with peace from the Prince of Peace that will cast out hatred. We bless you with love that will cast out fear and bless you with the joy that will end the grief and mourning. We bless you with freedom from corruption and freedom from Islamic extremism. We bless you with restoration and bless you with joy and unity among your people. We bless you with the healing of the hearts of your people. We bless you with health. We speak out God's blessing over this land and over this people so the land may be filled with wholeness, and that peace may restore the country in the Holy name of Jesus.

**For school children and school buildings.** We bless the children and the schools of Yemen. Bless the physical school buildings that are throughout the country and renew them as places where children will be welcome once again. Bless the school buildings with healing, wholeness, peace, and safety. We bless these buildings to be restored--that the fear that is in the very bricks of the building will be gone and that it will be replaced with peace and love and wholeness. We bless these buildings to once again be filled with children who are going to learn even exponentially more than they would on a normal basis.

**For the land of Yemen, the crops, and animals.** We bless you with the healing of your land. We mourn the blood spilled on this land and bless the land to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus,

the only effective atonement to deal with bloodshed. We curse all the landmines that have been planted. We bless your animals. We pray that they will multiply and be food for the people. We bless your land that it produces fruit. We bless your seeds so that there will be abundant growth of crops and much food for all the people.

**For those in poverty and unmet basic needs:** Yemen, we bless your poor with the blessings of enough to eat, clean water, a roof over their heads, and health. We bless you with humanitarian agencies to be able to work freely among you to provide this aid to your poor. We bless your government leaders with wisdom and care for their people, and the gift of kind donor nations and aid agencies to rebuild your country's infrastructure, including healthcare facilities, so that they may function effectively and provide the essential care which your people greatly need.

**For the women of Yemen:** We bless and speak love over the women of Yemen with the dignity that the Lord has given you. We bless you with all that the Lord has and really wants for you. We know He has so much for you, from all the goodness that comes out of His throne of grace. We bless men with the knowledge of how God sees His daughters.

**For all the people of Yemen:** We bless you with the revelation which leads to the knowledge of the living God and a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ from whom all blessings flow. *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows* (James 1:17).

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Thank you for praying for Sheba. May God bless you for praying for these people living in what was once known as Sheba. May those for whom we have been praying come to know why we have been praying for them: *All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God* (2 Corinthians 4:15).

All scriptures are NIV unless otherwise noted. Some bolding in the scriptures is done to bring emphasis by the writer.