

I Dared to Call Him Father Study Guide

I Dared to Call Him Father by Bilquis Sheikh

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Plot Summary

I Dared to Call Him Father is the story of Bilquis Sheikh. Written by Bilquis Sheikh it is the story of her journey to Christianity. Bilquis Sheikh is a wealthy, upper-class woman living in a palatial home surrounded by a lush garden in Wah, Pakistan. Bilquis also known as the Begum is a wealthy, respected Muslim woman who is greatly respected and revered by the townspeople. In fact, she is well known throughout her entire country. Bilquis' family has been in what is considered the ruling or higher class for centuries. Bilquis is a practicing Muslim, having been raised in Islam from the time she was four years, four days and four hours old—the traditional moment that Arabic is taught to Muslim children which is essential for the study of Islam.

The story takes place beginning when Bilquis is 46 years of age. At this point in her life, Bilquis has experienced quite an upheaval in her provincial life. Her husband of many years recently left her telling her he did not love her any more. She was crushed by his departure, which sometimes comes out in her haughty attitude to her many servants and the poor townspeople. Bilquis begins to experience several strange incidents that at first frighten her. She later sees that her unusual experiences and strange dreams are ultimately what leads her to a new spiritual beginning as a Christian woman. In one dream she sees herself dining with Jesus Christ. In another dream she meets with a person called John the Baptist. This prophetic dream is stunning since she had never heard the name "John the Baptist" before in her life.

Bilquis is at first reluctant to follow a path that may lead to any faith other than Islam. Since she is a Muslim woman, she knows the dangers that would lay ahead as it is against Islamic laws to convert to another religion or to even learn about one; reading the Bible is also forbidden. None the less, she is drawn to Christianity and is determined to learn what her dreams meant and begins reading the Bible. She also seeks out the advice of The Reverend David Mitchell and his wife, Synnove, with whom she has had casual contact in the past. Synnove prays with Bilquis knowing that the Lord is reaching out to Bilquis.

The Mitchells and other Christian friends, especially Ken and Marie Olds, support her spiritual sojourn. The title of the book stems from her contact with a local doctor. The female doctor is also a Catholic nun who senses her uncertainty and speaks with Bilquis about her faith. She tells Bilquis to not be afraid to call the Lord her Father. Once Bilquis takes this step, committing herself to Jesus, there is no turning back for her. Bilquis pursues her conversion to Christianity despite harrowing and dangerous odds. Learning of her religious conversion, her family boycotts her and will have nothing to do with her.

Bilquis receives threats against her life and property. However, she learns that staying strong in her beliefs is the only way—no matter what the ramifications may be. Bilquis faces additional chaos in her life when a new government is established in Pakistan. The new people's government has plans to reclaim land from large property owners like Bilquis and redistribute it. Bilquis does not panic but relies on the Lord to lead her in the direction he has chosen for her. Bilquis becomes a speaker for outreach groups and

ultimately moves to the United States with her grandson, Mahmud. Leaving her home is difficult, but she realizes that the most important thing in her life is her devotion to Christ.



Chapter 1, A Frightening Presence

Chapter 1, A Frightening Presence Summary and Analysis

Bilquis Sheikh is in her garden picking a bouquet of flowers when a damp, mist-like cloud brushes against her. It alarms Bilquis, but she recovers and goes on gathering flowers. Still spooked by the presence she felt, Bilquis rushes toward her home looking back for reassurance that her imagination was playing tricks on her. Suddenly she feels a tap on her right hand. Bilquis mentions the events to her maids. Nur-jan offers to fetch the Mullah from the mosque who will cleanse the garden of evil spirits. Bilquis feels foolish and decides to attribute the incident to her imagination. She starts to read the Koran but gets tired and falls off to sleep. She awakes the next day to the sound of the Muslim call to prayer, a familiar chant that she had heard for most days of her 46 years.

Bilquis' maids bring in her breakfast and tea and help her ready herself for the day. The maids discuss the murder of a Christian girl who had been staying in a missionary's home. Bilquis asks the women if there was anything new on the murder. There is no news but Bilquis and the others already know who killed the girl. The girl had forsaken her Muslim religion to become a Christian. The girl's brother angered by the shame the girl had brought on the family, had obeyed the ancient laws and killed his sister. Everyone knew who killed the girl but nothing would be done about it.

Bilquis notices the frame containing the photo of her and her husband, General Khalid Sheikh, Pakistan's Minister of the Interior, had been set upright again probably by one of the maids. She was angry at herself for keeping the photo. Bilquis had a glamorous life in the Northwest Frontier Province, hosting diplomats and businessmen from all over the world. Bilquis traveled extensively to cities like Paris and London, just to name a few. Five years before, this life came crashing down. Her husband left her and out of shame of the rejection she relocated to her family's ancestral home of Wah, near the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains.

Bilquis becomes known as recluse in her new home, surrounded by the lush gardens she created. Bilquis is isolated but lives in her palatial home with grandson, Mahmud and her fourteen servants whose ancestors had been with her family for ages. Mahmud is the son of Bilquis' daughter, Tooni, the youngest of her three children. Tooni is a doctor at a hospital in Rawalpindi. Bilquis adopted Mahmud when her daughter and her ex-husband could not agree on custody arrangements. Tooni visits often and the three of them are very close.

Mahmud is refusing to eat which is very disturbing to Bilquis. Mahmud's doctor finds nothing wrong with him. Nur-jan suggests that he could be under the attack of bad spirits and offers to fetch the Mullah. Bilquis finally agrees and the Mullah comes three days in a row saying prayers over the child whose health does improve. Bilquis has an eerie feeling: Could the strange mist in the garden, the murdered girl and her

grandson's affliction be all related? Bilquis will soon find out and her world will be turned upside down.



Chapter 2, The Strange Book

Chapter 2, The Strange Book Summary and Analysis

Bilquis tries to comfort herself about the eerie feelings she has been having by reading the Koran. She had first read the Koran beginning at age four years, four months and four days—the age when all Muslims begin this training. She had to learn Arabic since that was the only language the Koran is written in and cannot be translated. However, after her strange experience with the mist and her grandson, she begins to read and study the book anew. She walks in her garden with her grandson remembering walking there with her father who had died some years before. Her mother's death followed seven years after her father. Bilquis had been very close to both her parents and felt very alone after they passed away.

The Koran is not giving her the comfort she seeks. Bilquis wonders if reading earlier books like the Bible or Jewish writings would help, but none of the shops would carry the Bible. She could ask her Christian maid for a Bible, but that may put her main in danger. It is against Muslim law for a Christian to try to convert a Muslim. If Raisham would give Bilquis a Bible, it may appear to others that Raisham is trying to influence Bilquis; and, of course, the Bible is a falsification of the true story. Still, Bilquis is curious and directs her chauffeur, Manzur who is a Christian, to get a Bible for her.

Manzur gets the Bible for Bilquis who opens the book randomly and reads a passage from Romans that says in part, "I will call that my people, which was not my people. . . In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the sons of the Living God." The passage seems so profound to Bilquis that she is too emotional to read it aloud to her daughter. The words set the state for the most unusual dreams Bilquis ever had.



Chapter 3, The Dreams

Chapter 3, The Dreams Summary and Analysis

Bilquis returns to the Bible and reads a passage that says believing in Christ is the end to the struggle for righteousness. She reads further that if one believes in Jesus then he is saved. Of course, Bilquis knows that this was all wrong. Muslim laws teach that Jesus died and went to Heaven and God replaced him with a look-alike on the cross.

Someday he would come to earth and reign for forty years, marry, have children and stand to be judged by God like everyone else. Bilquis concludes that the Bible must be blasphemy. Bilquis falls asleep wondering why, if the God of the Koran is the same as the God of the Bible, is the God of the Koran one of vengeance and punishment while the God of the Bible is one of mercy and forgiveness.

That evening Bilquis dreams of dining with Jesus. Next she is with John the Baptist on a mountain top asking for Jesus. She wakes up calling the name of John the Baptist. It was an unusual name to her since she had not yet come across it in the Bible. Bilquis continues reading the Koran and the Bible side by side. She comes across a passage about a woman committing adultery. Bilquis contemplates that her punishing will be stoning as it is under Muslim law. To her surprise, Jesus makes the accusers look at their own guilt by telling the angry crowd, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). Several days later, Bilquis has another dream in which a magical perfume salesman brings Bilquis a golden perfume. He tells her not to touch it but rather leave it open on her bedside table. It will spread throughout the world. Bilquis wakes up half-expecting the golden perfume to be sitting on her night stand. Instead the Bible is in the exact place as the perfume was in her dream.

Bilquis tries to understand the connection between her two recent dreams. She takes a stroll in her garden and experiences an uplifted feeling and pleasant aroma. The aroma is not perfume and not from flowers but it is a very pleasant. Bilquis is eager to talk with someone knowledgeable in Christianity. What about her dreams? Who is John the Baptist? She decides to see some missionaries who had toured her gardens in the recent past. She would soon be on her way to see the Reverend and Mrs. David Mitchell.



Chapter 4, The Encounter

Chapter 4, The Encounter Summary and Analysis

Bilquis drives herself to the Reverend and Mrs. Mitchell's home. She needs to learn who John the Baptist is and how her recent experiences and dreams might involve the Christian religion. The Reverend is not home but Mrs. Mitchell greets her with much warmth. Bilquis learns that John the Baptist prepared the world for Jesus. Mrs. Mitchell tells Bilquis that she does not know of God but rather knows Him. They pray together, Mrs. Mitchell asking that Jesus show Bilquis the way to Him. Thinking of the nice aroma she had noticed later, Bilquis asks Mrs. Mitchell if there is any spiritual connection to perfume. Later Bilquis receives a note from Mrs. Mitchell quoting a passage in the Bible that says in part, ". . .knowledge of Him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume."

Mahmud is ill with an earache and other symptoms that worry Bilquis. Bilquis contacts his mother, Tooni, who is a doctor, to discuss his condition. Tooni wants Mahmud checked into the hospital so that he can have a thorough examination. Bilquis makes the arrangements and immediately takes him to the hospital. Arrangements are made by the hospital to allow Bilquis to stay in adjoining room during the child's stay. Tooni comes to visit that evening and Mahmud seems to perk up and feels better. Dr. Santiago, a Catholic nun, stops by Mahmud's room that night while Bilquis is at the child's bedside reading her Bible. Bilquis can't help but notice that Dr. Santiago seems transfixed as she focuses on Bilquis' Bible.

Dr. Santiago asks Bilquis if she can sit with her for a while. The doctor is tired and makes small talk for a short time. She finally broaches the subject of Bilquis' Bible. Seeing an upper-class Muslim woman reading the Holy Bible was not a sight that Dr. Santiago saw very often. Bilquis is honest with the kind holy woman and tells her the simple truth: Bilquis is in search of God. She briefly tells the doctor about her dreams, visions and discussions with the Reverend and Mrs. Mitchell. She admits that she is still reading the Koran as well and that she is comparing the two tomes in her quest for the truth. She tells Dr. Santiago that the Christian faith confuses her. Christians seems to make God so personal unlike the Muslim faith where God is a remote and respected from afar.

Dr. Santiago tells Bilquis there is but one way to the Lord. Bilquis needs to pray to God for the answers she is seeking. She tells Bilquis to talk to Him and He will respond and show you His way. The doctor tells Bilquis to pray to the Lord and call Him her Father. Mahmud recovers and they return home. Bilquis wonders if Mahmud's very temporary illness led her to the hospital so she could talk with Dr. Santiago. A few days later, it is Bilquis' 47th birthday which makes her think of her parents. She remembers how her father would put everything aside to give her attention. Bilquis thinks that surely God the Father would do the same. She kneels in prayer to Him.



Chapter 5, The Crossroads

Chapter 5, The Crossroads Summary and Analysis

Bilquis prays to God the Father. Her faith is stronger and she is able to call Him Father with growing confidence. Bilquis kneels in her large bedroom as she calls to her Father. Suddenly, she realizes that she is no longer alone in her bedroom. Bilquis can sense the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. She has the distinct sensation that His hand is resting on her bowed head. Transfixed by emotion, Bilquis can see His eyes filled with love and compassion for her. For a very long time, Bilquis savors the moment resting her head on his knees like a child and quietly weeping. Bilquis now realizes that the presence she felt in her garden and the fragrance that was consistently in the air had indeed been His presence all along.

She receives guidance from him to read the Bible and not the Koran. Bilquis has some fears that she would be turning her back on her family, all Muslims, if she were to become a Christian. However, she puts that thought aside as she reads in Matthew that one should not put one's parents or children above one's love for Jesus. She is startled to read in Revelations that Jesus is inviting her in to have dinner with him which was precisely one of her dreams. She prays that she be baptized and feels powerful waves wash across her. Thus, Bilquis feels cleansed and baptized. Bilquis tells her grandson that they will be celebrating Christmas at the Mitchells'. When they arrive for Christmas both David and Synnove Mitchell are astonished to hear that she received baptism from the Holy Spirit.



Chapter 6, Learning to Find His Presence

Chapter 6, Learning to Find His Presence Summary and Analysis

Bilquis would soon be surprised by some surprises over the next several days. Her new experience prove to be beyond that of dreams or visions that had initially awakened her spirit. In fact, these newest experiences left Bilquis shaken and afraid. One afternoon Bilquis starts to drift off on a nap in her bedroom while thinking of the Lord. However, she suddenly feels herself literally floating out of her bedroom window. She was quite certain that she was not asleep and dreaming this—she was awake and passing through her window. When Bilquis looks down and sees the earth below, she of course is frightened and suddenly finds herself back in her bedroom.

Bilquis apologizes to the Lord for reacting in fear rather than keeping faith in Him. She tells the Lord that he picked a coward. The Lord, however, does not give up. Later that same evening, Bilquis undergoes the same sensation. During this out of body experience, however, Bilquis talks to the Lord the entire time and was not afraid. She asks the Lord why he is sending her on these journeys. She turns to the Bible and reads in the Acts of the Apostles that the Lord suddenly whisked Philip away to a distant city.

Bilquis has several out of body experiences and finds confirmation in the Bible that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Bilquis feels uncertain about openly pronouncing her Christianity but after prayer begins to feel a boldness and a need to share news of her new found faith. Bilquis visits the Mitchells and meets other Christians who invite her to join them in fellowships. Several times when Bilquis does not feel in the mood to join in fellowships or read her Bible she feels an emptiness that is only renewed by following the Lord's direction. One challenge from the Lord that is particularly difficult is when he tells her to love her ex-husband. However, through a few trials and prayers, she suddenly feels a deep caring for him and prays for his happiness in his new life. Bilquis is unaware that she is about to receive attention from the dark side and is not prepared for it.



Chapter 7, The Baptism of Fire and Water

Chapter 7, The Baptism of Fire and Water Summary and Analysis

Bilquis is visited by a Satanic presence. She prays for help from the Lord. Jesus appears to her and tells her that she will not have another such experience. He tells her she must be baptized immediately. Bilquis fears the baptism since it will be an overt act against Islam and may put her or others in her household in danger. However, the feeling is so strong that she pursues baptism by asking her Christian friends for help. They finally agree to drive her to Peshawar a conservative community where she would surely be quickly exposed. None the less, she is determined and plans to travel to Peshawar. Bilquis feels such an overwhelming urgency to be baptized that she draws a bath and baptizes herself.

The plans have changed and her Christian friends and Bilquis travel to Abbottabad for her baptism. She does not tell them that she had baptized herself early. The formal ceremony takes place and Bilquis and all her Christian friends are weeping with joy. When she returns home, she learns from a maid that a number of her relatives had been by to see her. She felt an ominous sensation that she will soon fall from their graces. She receives a gift from Ken and Marie Olds, two of her Christian friends. It is a new Bible signifying her rebirth in Christ. Bilquis opens the Bible to a passage that begins, "I will scatter them abroad. . . ." She has no idea the significance these words will have.



Chapter 8, Was There Protection?

Chapter 8, Was There Protection? Summary and Analysis

Bilquis waits nervously to hear from what she assumes will be very angry relatives. However, days go by without a call or visit from any of them. She learns that her brother went to a cricket tournament, her uncle to a provincial meeting and cousins and aunts to other locations. She thought back to and took solace in the verse she read saying that the Lord "will scatter them abroad."

Bilquis meets with family members including two of her children. They are all hurt and upset by her decision to become a Christian. Her daughter Tooni is very upset having heard that her mother may be murdered over her actions. Tooni is also concerned that her ex-husband will claim legal custody for their son. Bilquis has another out-of-body experience that evening and when she awakens opens the Bible that has a passage that reassures her about her grandson's welfare.

A friend suggests to Bilquis that in terms of safety, she should not announce publicly that she has become a Christian. Bilquis responds that she cannot play games with God and if she dies, she dies. Her family continues to boycott her. One morning she learns that all her Christian servants, except Raisham, left during the night.

Chapter 9, The Boycott

Chapter 9, The Boycott Summary and Analysis

Raisham, the only Christian servant remaining, decides to take her chances and stay with Bilquis. No friends or family members call or visit Bilquis. She reads Mahmud Bible stories and he seems to be having a growing interest in them. Bilquis is called "traitor" and "infidel" in threatening phone calls and letters she receives. General Amar of the Pakistani Army calls on Bilquis one day. He tells her she is in danger and asks why she took the action she did. Bilquis explains her experiences and decision to become a Christian.

The intervening time during the boycott is a difficult one for Bilquis although she never is tempted to give up her Christianity. However, she faces many anonymous letters and telephone calls from irate neighbors who threaten her. Old friends warn her of horrible rumors of potential harm coming to her. Bilquis has to learn to live day to day. Bilquis stays true to her faith and has learned to be patient and see what the Lord has planned for her each day. Everything is temporary except the Lord's love. For not matter what may happen to her, she will still be living in His glory.

Feeling lonely, Bilquis invites her Christian friends over to her house for the Sunday night fellowship. Ken Olds is one of the attendees and advises her that she should have iron bars installed over her bedroom windows for protection. She considers his advice but decides that she will follow God's plan, whatever it is. She does not want to appear weak in her faith to the townspeople so she decides against the iron bars. Bilquis finds out that her favorite cousin, Karim, has died of a heart attack and that the funeral is today. She wants to go pay her respects and prays to the Lord for guidance and receives a response with a bold plan of action.



Chapter 10, Learning to Live in the Glory

Chapter 10, Learning to Live in the Glory Summary and Analysis

God directs Bilquis to attend her cousins funeral. Even though she is mostly ignored, she knows she is doing God's bidding. Over a relatively short period, Bilquis attends three more family funerals and experiences the same shunning as she did in the first one. However, some of the relatives are genuinely grateful that she came. In the coming months, Bilquis has several visitors who try to convince her that she made a mistake and should once again embrace Islam. She is respectful of them but of course not swayed. She uses these times to witness to her faith. Bilquis at first is concerned about the success of her efforts. Do any of the people she speaks to show signs of conversion to Christianity? She realizes that her only duty is to be obedient to God and not worry about the results.

Bilquis tells Ken and Marie Olds about the experience and how frightened she had been. Bilquis tries to make light of the experience but Ken takes it very seriously. He tells her not to minimize the things the Lord will have her contend with. He assures her that supernatural things are real. Ken tells her that the Lord will sometimes allow an evil entity to present itself to a person as a test of that person's faith. Ken refers to the Old Testament and how God permitted Satan to attack Job and how he allowed the Devil to tempt Christ in the forest. In each case, Job and Jesus came out victorious because of their unyielding faith in Him. Kent and Marie tell Bilquis that she is no doubt being prepared for further tests of her faith in God.



Chapter 11, Winds of Change

Chapter 11, Winds of Change Summary and Analysis

Bilquis is very upset to learn that the Olds would be leaving for a year's furlough. They had become cherished friends to Bilquis; but the Olds remind her that those she loves will always be leaving. Only Jesus will stay forever. Still it is difficult on the last day of good-byes. Bilquis accepts a visit from representatives of a group called World Vision. Dr. Daniel Baksh and Dr. Stanley Mooneyham visit Bilquis and asks her to speak at one of their gatherings in Singapore. The meeting is designed as a Christian outreach to Asian people. She would be asked to witness before this group.

Bilquis at first does not feel comfortable about the prospect. Since her passport is about to expire she decides she will let the Lord give his answer through the passport renewal process. Oftentimes it took months to gain renewal. Since she has only a few weeks before departure time, she mails in her papers figuring that there will not be enough time to gain renewal. However, within a week she receives the approved passport and thus has her answer.

At first Bilquis feels uncomfortable on her trip to Singapore. The Christians on the plane are loud and raucous. To Bilquis they do not seem respectful and seem to extroverts more into themselves than the Lord. Bilquis is wondering if she made a mistake in attending the conference. However, once she arrives at the conference hall she feels the presence of the Lord very strongly. There are thousands of men and women in the conference hall, the largest number of people Bilquis has even seen at one gathering. As Bilquis enters the hall, she is uplifted by their joyous singing of "How Great Thou Art."

Bilquis immediately knows that she made the right decision as she once again feels the familiar Presence of God's Spirit and it never before seemed so alive. She is learning evermore that she needs to remain at the Lord's side. He is always there and when she feels the emptiness it is she who leaves his side. Bilquis successfully gives her presentation to the gathered thousands. Bilquis meets a person who is to become very important to her. Dr. Christy Wilson, pastor of a church in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Bilquis find a rapport in the Lord's spirit as they discuss his work. Bilquis is happy to return to Wah but very willing to travel on an occasional trip outside her country. However, she is unaware that the weaning process was soon to have a more severe impact upon her life.



Chapter 12, A Time for Sowing

Chapter 12, A Time for Sowing Summary and Analysis

A year after Bilquis' Singapore sojourn, the Mitchells leave for a year's furlough. Bilquis continues the Sunday evening fellowship gatherings, but there are only five professional Christians remain. Bilquis suggests that to invigorate the group, that their meetings be opened to all Christians—not just professional people. After initial resistance from the others, they agree to invite all Christians and all non-Christians interested in finding out more about the Lord. Their meetings are successful and many conversions to Christianity occur.

Led by the Lord, Bilquis opens her beloved garden with its succulent fruit trees to the village children. She also pays the hospital bills of a needy family in a near-by village. Her servant Nur-jan is finally convinced to open herself up to the Lord and becomes a Christian. Nur-jan is reluctant to openly pronounce her conversion since her husband is a Muslim. Bilquis at first encourages her to do so but learns that like Nocomemus in the Gospel of John that the Lord understands the secret believer.

Bilquis is disturbed when she receives a call from an irate uncle. He tells her that her conversion is one thing but her work in converting others is not acceptable. Bilquis is warned by a servant that she and her beloved Mahmud are in danger.



Chapter 13, Storm Warnings

Chapter 13, Storm Warnings Summary and Analysis

Months pass and there are no additional danger signs or warnings. In an attempt to rebuild relationships with her family, she decides to have a Christmas dinner at her home and invite them all. However, she reads a passage in the Bible that tells her to dine with the poor and not the rich. Hence, she changes her guest list to all the village people. The party turns out to be a week-long celebration enjoyed by all, especially Bilquis and Mahmud.

Warnings and threats continue to haunt Bilquis, but she chooses to take no action and leave her fate in God's hands. At one point an attempt is made to burn Bilquis' house down. She and her servants work hand in hand to put out the flames. The People's Party wins the election in December of 1970. What will change for Bilquis is that the ruling class to which she belongs will no longer have as much influence. Ali Bhutto who is elected as the Premier is talking of land reformation or reallocation. Her servant Raisham tells Bilquis of a dream she had in which Bilquis was fleeing her home in her car and was then robbed of her money. Bilquis muses that God may be stripping her of her land, home and money so that she is more than ever dependent upon Him.

In December of 1970, four years after Bilquis' conversion, Pakistan has its first national one-man one-vote election. The People's Party wins the election which is good news for the masses but not necessarily for someone in Bilquis' elevated class. Bilquis' son Khalid makes a surprise visit. His visit is not a social call as he comes to warn her about rumors he has heard about the new government reallocating the land. He advises her to sell small plots so that the new landowners will be less likely to lose their land. Bilquis and Mahmud travel to Lahore to finalize a contract for selling off part of her land. They are reunited with Mahmud's mother, Tooni, and all have an emotional experience when Tooni must depart afterwards. Bilquis meets with Peggy Schlorholtz a Christian woman introduced by her by Marie Olds. Peggy asks Bilquis to accompany her to the US for a four-month speaking tour to Christians there. Bilquis tells Peggy she will pray about it and give her God's answer.



Chapter 14, Flight & Epilogue

Chapter 14, Flight & Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Bilquis is able to cope with several Pakistani laws that could have prevented her and Mahmud from leaving. One problem she faces is that per Pakistan laws, a traveling citizen can take only a limited amount of his or her money abroad. After Bilquis and her son do some calculations, they arrive at the fact that Bilquis and Mahmud will be allowed to take only \$750 dollars between them—hardly enough for the two of them for four months! Luckily, a friend is able to make special arrangements for the wire transfer to another friend for funds that will be adequate for Bilquis and her grandson.

Another Pakistani law requires that any citizen leaving the country must provide a certification that their taxes and fees for properties and incomes are up to date. Bilquis has no problem with that; her payments are all current. The only problem she has is that she must get a copy of this certification through a slow-moving government office. Worse than slow-moving, on the day that Bilquis and her son Khalid visit the government office, the officer workers are all on strike that day! Bilquis is told that no one can help her and that she will not receive a copy of the needed certificate. With the Lord's spirit behind her, she demands to see the government official in charge of that office. When they meet with the official, he recognizes her names and is impressed with her as he has heard much talk of her wonderful charity work. The official works around the strike by using a temporary worker who is not in the union and expedites the issuance of a certificate she needs in order to travel.

Bilquis is sad to leave her home country and realizes that if she does leave she will probably not come back. She has some apprehension before she leaves so she moves from a friend's house to a hotel to protect Mahmud and herself from possible danger. Bilquis and Mahmud board the giant 747 airliner for New York City. She thanks God for letting her travel with Him.

Epilogue

Bilquis writes this epilogue in 1978, six years after she and Mahmud left their homeland. They have settled in southern California. Mahmud is now a handsome 15 year old. Bilquis is still serving the Lord in the ways he directs her. She is sad that she will never see her homeland again but knows it is for the best. As the new government developed, Christian missionaries and institutions were banned from Pakistan. Hence, it would not have been a good idea for Bilquis to return. Bilquis has learned that the Lord works through those who live within Him. Bilquis is serving the Lord and living in His glory.



Characters

Bilquis Sheikh

Bilquis Sheikh is the author of *I Dared to Call Him Father*. Bilquis Sheikh is a wealthy, upper-class woman living in a palatial home surrounded by a lush garden in Wah, Pakistan. Bilquis is also known as the Begum the definition of which is "a high-ranking Muslim woman." Bilquis' family has been in what is considered the ruling or higher class for centuries. In her position, Bilquis is looked to as a leader of the community. Bilquis is a practicing Muslim, having been raised in Islam from the time she was four years, four days and four hours old—the traditional moment that Arabic is taught to Muslim children. The Koran is written only in Arabic and not translated, so in order to study it, the children must learn Arabic.

The story takes place beginning when Bilquis is 46 years of age. Bilquis does not overtly question the only religion she has known over her entire life. However, she is not happy and seems to feel a void in her spiritual life. Bilquis experiences several strange incidents that at first scare her but ultimately lead her to a new spiritual beginning. Bilquis has several disturbing dreams and incidents that she does not understand. One evening she is walking in her garden and feels something that she cannot see brush by her. The feeling of this presence alarms her and stays with her throughout the evening. Subsequently, she has several dreams one in which she is dining with Jesus Christ. In another dream she meets with a person called John the Baptist.

Bilquis is an intelligent and educated woman and knows full well that these incidents involve Christianity. She seeks out the advice of The Reverend David Mitchell and his wife, Synnove, whom she knows on a very casual basis. Synnove prays with Bilquis knowing that the Lord is reaching out to Bilquis. Bilquis of course is at first reluctant to follow this path since she is a Muslim and it is against Islamic laws to convert to another religion or to even learn about it. None the less, she is drawn to Christianity and begins reading the Bible.

The Mitchells and other Christian friends support her journey toward Christianity. A doctor at a local hospital who is a Catholic nun speaks with Bilquis about her faith. She tells Bilquis to not be afraid to call the Lord her Father. Once Bilquis takes this step, there is no turning back. Bilquis pursues her conversion to Christianity despite harrowing and dangerous odds. Learning of her religious conversion, her family boycotts her and will have nothing to do with her. Most of her servants leave their positions because they are afraid of retribution themselves. Bilquis receives death threats and threats against her property. However, she learns that staying strong in her beliefs is the only way—no matter what the ramifications may be.

Once a new government is established in Pakistan, conditions worsen for Bilquis. As she has learned, though, she allows God to make her decisions and lead her down the path he has chosen for her. Bilquis becomes a speaker for outreach groups and



ultimately moves to the United States with her grandson, Mahmud. Leaving her home was difficult, but she realizes that the most important thing in her life is her faith in Christ.

Ken and Marie Olds

Ken and Marie Olds is a Christian couple that Bilquis meets through the Reverend David and Syvonne Mitchell. When she first meets the Olds, she has an immediate affinity with them. Likewise, they feel great affection for the brave Pakistani woman who is risking grave consequences in her conversion to Christianity. The Olds provide great support to Bilquis in her journey to conversion to the faith they so love. Bilquis first meets the couple when Reverend and Mrs. Mitchell invite her to join them in a Sunday evening fellowship. Bilquis finds comfort in Ken's kind, twinkling blue eyes. Ken, an Englishman, is also a civil engineer is open and friendly. His wife, Marie, is an American nurse with a friendly smile that is appealing and disarming.

At their first meeting, the Olds are impressed with the story Bilquis relates to her about her dreams and other incidents that has led her to the Lord. Ken formerly lived in Wah and remembers seeing Bilquis in her beautiful gardens. He did not know her name but thought she looked lonely and sad. After her conversion, she seems like a different person—smiling and happy like a child. From that first evening on, Bilquis has a standing invitation from the Olds to join them every Sunday evening for fellowship gatherings at their home.

Bilquis and the Olds become very close friends. Ken becomes concerned for Bilquis' safety as her conversion process takes place. He is aware of the rumors of possible harm to her. He advises her to have bars put on her doors. She at first agrees but changes her mind—her faith in the Lord will show her the way. The Olds get word that they must go on a furlough and will be out of the country for an undetermined length of time. At first Bilquis is panicked since the Olds had become her best friends and greatest supporters. Upon their departure from Pakistan, Marie gives Bilquis comfort. She tells Bilquis that in life loved ones will always be leaving. "Only Jesus stays with you forever." Though Bilquis loves the Olds and misses them dearly, she knows that Marie's words were those from the Lord.

The Olds play another important role in Bilquis life in later years. When Bilquis is uncertain where she and Mahmud will wind up, she calls Marie Olds to discuss her future. Marie encourages her to contact a friend in Lahore, Pakistan, Peggy Schlorholtz. Bilquis follows Marie's suggestion and contacts Peggy. There is an immediate friendship between the two women. Peggy suggests that Bilquis travel with her to the United States and join her on a Christian speaking tour. Bilquis and Mahmud travel with Peggy to the United States. They wind up moving there permanently and Bilquis spends the rest of her days there in peace and safety and as an ever faithful Christian.



Mahmud

Mahmud is the beloved grandson of Bilquis. Bilquis has adopted Mahmud because her daughter Tooni and her ex-husband are having disputes over his custody.

Tooni

Tooni is the daughter of Bilquis. She is a doctor and the mother of Mahmud whom Bilquis has adopted.

Khalid

Khalid is one of Bilquis two sons. He lives a distance away in Lahore. Khalid helps his mother dispose of her vast land holdings once the reform government is established and threatens to take her property.

Reverend David and Syvonne Mitchell

Reverend David and Syvonne Mitchell are the Christians that Bilquis first turns to when her interest in Christianity is piqued.

Raisham

Raisham is one of Bilquis handmaidens. She is Christian and stays with Bilquis even when times get tough.

Nur-jan

Nur-jan is another servant. She is a Muslim woman who eventually converts Christianity. Nur-jan keeps her conversion secret fearing retribution from her Muslim husband and family.

General Amar

General Amar is a top commander with the Pakistani Army. He warns Bilquis to take care due to rumors he has heard about people plotting to kill her.

Peggy Schlorholtz

Peggy Schlorholtz is the Christian woman who encourages Bilquis to move to the United States and tour with her as a Christian speaker.



Objects/Places

Pakistan

Pakistan is the ancestral home of Bilquis' upper-class family for over 700 years.

Lahore, Pakistan

Lahore, Pakistan, is the city where Bilquis' son Khalid lives with his family.

Wah, Pakistan

Wah, Pakistan, is the hometown of Bilquis Sheikh who converts from Islam to Christianity.

United States

Bilquis Sheikh flees to the United States when the government in Pakistan changes and threatens to take the property she owns.

Rawalpindi, Pakistan,

Rawalpindi, Pakistan, is the city where Bilquis' daughter Tooni lives.

Singapore

Bilquis travels to Singapore at the request of World Vision to testify about her Christian conversion as part of an Asian outreach.

Bilquis' Lush Garden

Bilquis' beautiful and expansive garden is famous in the region, a place where even tourists come to see.

Thousand Oaks, California

Thousand Oaks, California, is the city where Bilquis settles with her grandson Mahmud, making her final home in this southern California location.

The Koran

The Koran is the Holy Book of the Muslim religion.

Bible

The Bible is the Holy Book of Christian religions.



Themes

Christianity

The main theme of the book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*, is the path to Christianity of Bilquis Sheikh an upper class Muslim woman living in Wah, Pakistan. Bilquis feels empty and detached from her religion. She hungers for more fulfillment from her faith. When a mullah visits Bilquis he advises her to repeat passages in the Koran. She tells him that God has forgotten her. It is against Islamic law to study Christianity or even read the Bible. The Muslim Holy Book, the Koran, teaches that the Christian concept of the Trinity is wrong and that God is only One God.

Bilquis has some of her initial contacts with Christianity in the form of dreams. In one dream, she sees herself dining with Jesus Christ. In another, she is speaking with John the Baptist. To the best of her recollections, she has never heard of John the Baptist. Although the dreams are not frightening per se, she feels emotionally wrought and confused about them and their meaning. Bilquis seeks the advice of a local Christian leader and his wife, The Reverend David Mitchell and Synnove Mitchell. They see that the Lord is reaching out to Bilquis and pray with her and support her in what ultimately becomes her conversion to Christianity.

Bilquis' new Christian friends are amazed at how closely related Bilquis dreams and experiences are to passages in the Bible. Bilquis has the sensation of a fragrant aroma surrounding her although there is no perfume nor flowers nearby. She then dreams of perfume in a golden vial by her bedside. When she awakens, the Bible is in the spot where the perfume vial was in her dream. She learns of a passage in the Bible about His word being passed like a wonderful fragrance in the air. In other incidents, she is in the same room as Christ who is giving her advice and counsel on matters in her current life.

Bilquis faces many barriers in her conversion to Christianity. She learns that whenever she leaves the Lord—that is, returns to old, selfish behaviors—she feels alone and empty. When she returns to God, she feels His comfort and protection and knows she can face whatever he has in store for her. A friend tells Bilquis that part of life is leaving loved ones and that the only one who never leaves is the Lord.

Islam

As the story of *I Dared to Call Him Father* opens, Bilquis Sheikh is a high-born Muslim woman living in Wah, Pakistan. There are images of and references to the Muslim faith included throughout this book about a woman born and reared in the Islamic faith turning to Christianity in mid-life. An incident at the beginning of the story describes the fear that Bilquis has when she feels a strange presence in her garden. Her Muslim maid offers to fetch the local mullah who will come and cleanse the garden with holy water.



Instead, Bilquis turns to the Koran, the Muslim Holy Book for comfort. The next morning she is awakened by the high chant of the mullah's call to prayer. The chant is one that has been called unchanged for her forty-six years.

There is a reference to the recent murder of a local girl. Although the villagers stay mum about the incident, they all know why she was killed. The girl had forsaken her Muslim faith to be baptized as a Christian. The girl's brother, enraged by the shame brought on the family by this sin, had obeyed ancient Islamic law that those who fall away from their faith must be slain. Bilquis stresses that although not all such violations are treated as harshly, there are always zealots who follow the letter of the law.

Bilquis begins her training in the Islamic religion at the age of four years, four days and four hours. This is the exact age that youngsters are taught the Arabic language so that they can study the religion. The Koran is written in Arabic and by Islamic law cannot be translated to another language. The Islamic religion teaches that the angel Gabriel began giving Muhammad the words of the Koran on the "Night of Power" in the year 610 A.D. There are references in the Koran about the prophet Jesus Christ. These passages, according to Muslim teaching, were falsified by early Christians. The Koran warns against the Christian concept of the Trinity. Muslim teaches that God is only One God.

Spiritual Experiences/Dreams

Bilquis considers herself a blessed woman who experiences incidents and has dreams that reach out to her spiritual being. The first such incident occurs one evening as Bilquis is walking through her palatial garden. Something invisible clasps her hand and brushes by her. The feeling of this strong presence alarms her and stays with her throughout the evening and the days following. Subsequently, she has several dreams one in which she is dining with Jesus Christ. In another dream she meets with a person called John the Baptist. This prophetic dream is stunning since she had never heard the name of "John the Baptist" before in her life.

Bilquis has an on-going sensation of a lovely aroma in the air about her. There is no perfume nor flowers to account for the fragrance. Bilquis has a dream that focuses on a golden vial of perfume on her nightstand. The dream is so real that after waking the next morning, she looks in that spot for the perfume vial. Instead, she finds her Bible. Later she learns of a passage in the Bible that tells her that His word will be spread in the air like a wonderful perfume.

After her family learns of her conversion, they are very angry. She nervously awaits a large number of relatives to arrive at her house to berate her for her violation of Islamic laws. Bilquis opens her Bible to a page that says in part, "I will scatter them abroad. . . ." None of the relatives come to her house. She later learns that they were sent on errands and voyages all over the country and were unable to come. She remembers the passage that God "will scatter them abroad."

Bilquis also has several out-of-body experiences that take her to places and situations all over the world. She learns that God uses her as a tool in His work and that he needs her constant faith and prayers and that she needs Him to show her the way.



Style

Perspective

The author of the book *I Dared to Call Him Father* is the subject of the book and therefore written from her point of view. The chronological account of Bilquis Sheikh's conversion from the Islamic faith to Christianity reveals the roller-coaster of emotions that Bilquis faces during this sojourn. Initially, Bilquis is scared of an unknown presence she feels about her. Her dreams of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist while not scary in content, are frightening to her in their potential meaning.

Bilquis Sheikh is a high-born member of Pakistan's ruling class. Her ancestors enjoyed this status for the last 700 years. She is a 46-year-old Muslim who is intelligent and well-educated. Bilquis is looked up to in her community of Wah, Pakistan. When a woman of this position dares to violate the strict Islamic laws against conversion to any faith, it is considered a sin and a shame and a scandal. Even those who are considered "lower caste" begin to treat her with derision after her unholy conversion.

Bilquis Sheikh writes with much emotion. The reader learns the inner feelings and fears with which Bilquis must deal and are developed by the writer in a measured and understandable manner. However, Bilquis never attempts to evoke sympathy or pity from the reader. Her path to Christianity though peppered with anguish and fear is one which Bilquis is happy to take. She is an inspiration to others who may face huge changes in life, ones that may not be easy and certainly not popular.

Tone

A shift of tone is perceptible after the conversion to Christianity that Bilquis Sheikh undergoes in her autobiographical account entitled *I Dared to Call Him Father*. The story begins when the forty-six year old Pakistani woman feels an undeniable though unknown presence in her garden. Bilquis is a Muslim woman in the ruling class in Pakistan. In her large palatial estate, she makes references to her many servants—one such reference mentions fourteen servants. Raised in Pakistan where class is part of life, she is an imperious figure who is harsh and impatient with her servants and those of the lower class. However, after she begins to grow closer to Jesus Christ, her attitude toward her servants and others who are less fortunate or poor takes an obvious and positive change.

An example of her change toward her servants is observed in one episode after one of her servants converts to Christianity. Bilquis, her servant Raisham (who was a Christian before Bilquis' conversion) and her newly converted servant Nur-jan celebrate together. They have tea and snacks and talk and laugh together like girlfriends. Bilquis thinks to herself that her relatives would consider her cavorting with her servants as shameful.



Bilquis' family is upset with her after her conversion. She plans to try to reconcile with them by inviting them to a lavish party at palatial estate. She reads in the Bible that says in essence one should not invite the rich to one's home but rather the poor should be invited. Bilquis takes this to heart and invites all the poor and even homeless to her house. She and her grandson, Mahmud, never had so much fun in their lives. The party planned for a day winds up lasting a week.

The beginning of this story has a tone that is tight and restrained. As her story evolves, Bilquis writes the details of her conversion to her beloved Christianity with obviously growing love and tenderness.

Structure

The book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*, is separated into fourteen chapters and ends with an epilogue. There are 173 pages and no illustrations. The chapters are not lengthy and set up in a logical, chronological order. Many of the chapters end with cliff-hangers. These endings are not overly dramatic yet they provide hints of what the reader will encounter in the succeeding chapter. The first chapter, entitled "A Frightening Presence," relates the story of Bilquis Sheikh's first awakenings to Christianity.

As a mature Muslim woman of 46 years of age, it is a frightening prospect to entertain the possibility of converting from Islam to Christianity. The Muslim religion is all Bilquis has known or learned about. Islamic laws forbids conversion. One who does take this step does so at great risk—potentially the loss of one's life. Bilquis experiences dreams about Christ and incidents where she senses a presence, her fears of the forbidden though somehow comforting possibility scares her. This chapter ends with "events had been set in motion which would shatter the world I'd known all my life."

After Bilquis has committed to the Lord and converted to Christianity through her Baptism, she faces derision from her family. Worse than that, however, are the threats she receives and hears about that place her at risk of physical injury or even death. Rather than take steps to protect herself—like installing bars on her windows—she leaves her safety and protection in the hands of the Lord. However, as threats escalate, she questions whether she should have kept her conversion to herself. This chapter ends with an ominous warning about her grandson's safety. She muses whether she should have remained a secret Christian like Nicodemus. She receives many answers to the contrary in the chapters succeeding this one.



Quotes

"She [Raisham] knew as well as I did who had killed that girl. After all, the girl had forsaken her Muslim faith to be baptized a Christian. So the brother, infuriated by the shame this sin had brought upon his family, had obeyed the ancient law of the faithful that those who fall away from their faith must be slain." Page 18.

"I remembered exactly how old I was when I first started learning Arabic so that I could read our holy book: I was four years old, four days old and four hours old. This was the day every Muslim child began to unravel the Arabic script." Page 26.

"Then she [Synnove] said quietly, 'I'm afraid I don't know to much about God, but I do know Him.'" Page 41.

"Something happened to me as I went through the book; instead of reading the Bible, I found myself living it. It was as if I stepped through its pages into that ancient world of Palestine when Jesus Christ walked the stony roads of Galilee." Page 61.

"Is it true what people are saying? You've put yourself in a very dangerous situation! I've heard rumors that some people want to kill you!" Page 98.

"Repentance, I discovered, was not tearful remorse so much as admitting where I had gone wrong and avowing with His help never to make that mistake in the future. As I realized my own weakness, I could call upon His strength." Page 110.

"A lie is a lie and is always of Satan, the father of lies. He uses 'harmless' white lies to get us started in this insidious habit. Lies pave the way for greater temptations to come. Satan whispers that a white lie is 'consideration' for other people. We bend ourselves to the world instead of to Jesus who is the Truth." Page 110.

"This is how Jesus explained the Trinity to him: 'Just as in the sun there are both heat and light, but the light is not heat and the heat is not light, but both are one, though in their manifestation they have different forms, so I and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, bring light and heat to the world. . . Yet We are not three but One, just as the sun is but one.'" Page 117.

"Oh, Begum Sahib must you be so open? We are afraid for you and for the boy. My heart skipped. Now it was my turn to wonder whether it had not been best to remain a secret believer in this land, and yes, even in this family where Jesus was anathema." Page 141.

"God gave all men all earth to love, but, since our hearts are small, ordained for each one spot should prove beloved overall. . ." Page 161.

"I held out my hand to Him. He was my only security. My only joy was staying in His Presence. As long as I could stay there I knew that I would be living in the glory." Page 169.

"I have learned painfully, step by step, that when we have nothing at all, that is the moment when the Lord can really begin to work through us. For that is the moment when we begin to live most steadily in His glory. Page 173.



Topics for Discussion

Bilquis has several dreams that puzzle her about faith. Describe these dreams.

In Pakistan, the community is based on social classes. What class does Bilquis belong to and why is her class important to the story of her conversion to Christianity?

How is the young boy Mahmud related to Bilquis? Who is his mother and who has legal custody of him?

4. Describe how some of Bilquis' dreams have a direct relationship to passages in the Bible. What are some specific examples?

By openly becoming a Christian, why was Bilquis' life potentially in danger?

Who are Ken and Marie Olds? What role do they play in Bilquis' life and conversion to Christianity?

Name the various parts of Bilquis' old life that were removed from her after her conversion. How does she attribute these changes as important to her devotion to God?