

The Great Messengers

HAZRAT ZUL QARNAIN



Published By:



DARUL IHSAN
HUMANITARIAN CENTRE
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In Surah Kahf there is mention of a king who had the appellation ‘Zul Qarnain’. The preferred view of the scholars is that Zul Qarnain was a pious and just king and not a messenger. He conquered many lands and established peace and justice there. Allah has granted him the means to do whatever he needed to do. Amongst his travels was a journey to the far East, another to the far West and another in a Northerly direction. It was during this journey to the North that he built a great wall to protect the people of the area from the marauding Ya’jooj and Ma’jooj tribes.

Background

The Qur'an discusses the incident of Zul Qarnain in response to the question posed by the Jews. Muhammad bin Ishaq (Rahimahullah) has reported from Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas رضي الله عنه that the Quraysh of Makkah once dispatched Nadhr bin Harith and Uqba bin Abi Mu'et to meet with some Jewish scholars in Madinah (then known as Yathrib). The message to the scholars was, “You people call yourselves the people of the book and claim to have knowledge of the previous prophets that we have do not have. We therefore ask you whether your scriptures say anything about the claim to prophethood that Muhammad is making?”

When the Jews were given the message, they replied, “Forget everything else. We shall give you three questions to pose to him. If he responds correctly to these questions, then you may rest assured that he is certainly the true Nabi of Allah and it would be compulsory for you to follow him. If he cannot reply to them, then he is a fraudster and you may do with him as you please. The three questions are:

1. Who is the person who conquered lands in the east and in the west?
2. What happened to the youngsters who hid in a cave for fear of their

king?

3. What is the soul?"

When the Quraysh received the reply, they said, "Now we shall be able to easily make a decision concerning Muhammad ﷺ. This was because it could only be through the help of Allah that an unlettered person such as Nabi ﷺ could reply to such questions. They then posed the questions to Nabi ﷺ and it was in response to these questions that Allah revealed Surah Kahf, thereby responding to all the queries.

Was Zul Qarnain Alexander of Macedonia?

It is incorrect that the title Zul Qarnain refers to the Macedonian king known as Alexander the Great. All the early and latter-day scholars unanimously agree that Alexander was not Thul Qarnain. While the Qur'an describes Zul Qarnain as a just and pious Muslim king, Alexander was known to be a Greek mushrik and a tyrant.

Furthermore, in his discussion of the messengers, Imam Bukhari (Rahimahullah) has narrated the Hadith concerning Zul Qarnain before the Ahadith of Hazrat Ibraheem عليه السلام. This makes it evident that Zul Qarnain lived even before the time of Hazrat Ibraheem عليه السلام and could therefore not be Alexander of Macedon, who lived barely 300 years before Hazrat Isa عليه السلام and who had Aristotle as his tutor and adviser.

However, Hazrat Ali عليه السلام said, "Zul Qarnain was neither a Nabi nor an angel, but a man who loved Allah and who Allah loved." After sanctioning this Hadith, Hafidh Ibn Hajar (Rahimahullah) has stated that he heard this narration reported with an authentic chain of narrators from the book Mukhtarah by Hafidh Hadith Ziyaa'ud Deen Maqdasi (Rahimahullah). Nonetheless, most scholars believe that Zul Qarnain was a king.

Apart from Hazrat Ali عليه السلام, Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas عليه السلام also believed that was a pious king, whose actions Allah loved, thereby earning him

praise in the Qur'an and victory in his expeditions. This opinion was shared by Hazrat Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه as well. Allamah Ibn Katheer (Rahimahullah) has quoted all the relevant Ahadith and concluded by saying, "The most correct opinion is that he (Zul Qarnain) was a king from amongst the just kings."

The title of Zul Qarnain (the one with two horns) was given for several reasons:

Some say that it was because he reigned over both Rome and Persia, each represented by a horn. Imam Zuhri (Rahimahullah) stated that the two horns referred to the east and the west, since he reigned over territories on both sides.

Some Mufasireen state that the horns refer to the two centuries during which he reigned and therefore depicts his extended age.

The Qur'an does not deem it necessary to provide details concerning times, places and identities.

The Wall Erected by Zul Qarnain

The Qur'an states that he reached where between two mountain ranges there was a pass where he met a people who were unable to understand his language. They somehow explained to him that the tribes of Ya'jooj and Ma'jooj come through the pass to trouble and harass them and to commit mischief in the land. They asked him to accept tribute from them and to close up the pass to prevent Ya'jooj and Ma'jooj from crashing over. He told them that what Allah gives is sufficient for him and there is no need for them to pay him. However, he is prepared to help them if they were prepared to help him. They gathered pieces of iron and from that Zul Qarnain built a wall between the mountains from iron and then melted copper with which to strengthen the wall. In spite of Ya'jooj and Ma'jooj being such strong tribes, they were unable to break down this wall. Neither could they come over it to launch further attacks and so the people were saved from their attacks.

The Need for History

Just as it is necessary to have knowledge of language, Ahadith, narrations of the Sahabah ﷺ and other sciences to understand the meaning of the Qur'an, so too is it necessary to have knowledge of history. This is because there are certain parts of the Qur'an (such as the episode of Zul Qarnain) that can be understood only with the knowledge of history.

A Just Leader

It has been a known fact throughout the ages that the cornerstone of a just government was serving the people. The just king would therefore spend freely from the state treasury whatever was needed for the benefit of the people, while taking for himself only what was necessary. Furthermore, he would never burden the people with unreasonable taxation. On the contrary, a tyrannical regime would focus on personal luxuries and remain indifferent towards the needs of the people. If the state spent on the people, there would always be some personal agenda. Such governments levy burdensome taxes on people and almost always end up in bankruptcy.

Since Zul Qarnain was a just king, he refused to take any payment from the people when he built them the wall and made it clear that Allah had given him all he needed. In fact, Allah had given him so much because he utilised it all for the benefit of the people.

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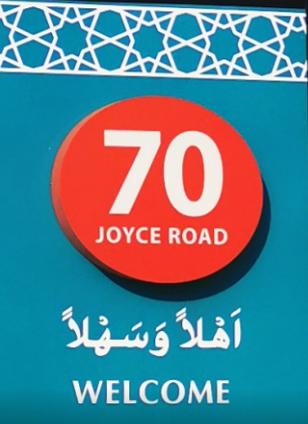
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About Darul Ihsan

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre provides education, guidance, social, empowerment and welfare services to the community. In providing this service, we adopt a holistic approach, that gives due importance to basic needs as well as human rights and dignity of those that we serve.

Founding Philosophy

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre is a multi-purpose, humanitarian-services providing organisation. 'Ihsan' means compassion towards mankind and to act with excellence. The Centre was established in the year 2000 with the primary objective of serving humanity and alleviating poverty and hardship locally and abroad. Since its inception, it has developed and established many humanitarian projects and provides a variety of free services to the community.

Key Objectives

One of the key objectives of the Centre is to promote a better understanding of humanity and peace, thereby serving as a bridge-builder between faiths and communities. Through guidance, Ubuntu and empowerment, the organisation hopes to train and develop the youth to become torch bearers of hope, peace and compassion to humanity.

