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Section 11: Zulqarnayn, The Gog and the Magog, The Barrier

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 83

83. "And they ask you about Zulgarnayn. Say: 'I will recite unto you a remembrance of him'."

The Arabic term /qarn/ has two meanings: 'a long time' and 'the animal horn'. Zulqarnayn was called by this appellation because: either he ruled for a very long time, or two handles of his hair were braided like two horns on his head, or there were two horns on his hat.

The objective meaning of the term /qarnayn/ may also be the east and the west of the world, (as the Arabs often say 'qarni-ash-Shams' which means 'two horns of the sun' intending the east and the west of the world). Then, since he had occupied the lands of the east and the west of the world of his time, he was called 'Zul-Qarnayn'.

Imam Bagir (as) said:

"Zul-Qarnayn was not a prophet, but he was a righteous man whom Allah loved. He enjoined his people to piety. It happened that people knocked on one side of his head. After that, he disappeared for a length of time.

Then he returned and repeated his invitation again. People struck another knock on the other side of his head. Therefore, because of those two knocks, he had been known as Zul-Qarnayn." 1

Regarding the statements of two Greek historians, and some points from the Turah (Book of Isaiah, Chapter 46, No. 11 and so on), and the discovery of the statue of Cyrus in the nineteenth century A.D. which had a crown with two horns on its head, Tafsir–i–Nemunah adapts Zul–Qarnayn with Cyrus.

But, the late Sha'rani has said that Zul-Qarnayn and Eskandar Maqduni had been the same, and he had been the student of Aristotle from the time when he was thirteen years old. The author of Al-mizan believes that he was Cyrus.

However, it is not definitely known that how long Zul–Qarnayn ruled, what his real name was, how long he lived, whether he was a human or an angel, a prophet or a righteous servant, whether he was Alexander or Cyrus, why his name was Zul–Qarnayn, how much possibilities and forces he had, what part of the land he ruled, how long was the length and the width of the dam he built, what age it was, whether this dam is the Wall in China or not.

Concerning these ideas, opinions are divided, and there have been cited many statements and discussions upon these matters which are not of avail to be mentioned here. The aim should be looked for, not the insignificant matters which produce no guidance.

Therefore, this verse says:

"And they ask you about Zulgarnayn. Say: 'I will recite unto you a remembrance of him'."

The beginning phrase of this verse shows that the story of Zul-qarnyn had been being discussed among people before they came to the Prophet (S) and asked their differences and ambiguities from him.

Surah Al-Kahf - Verses 84 - 85

- 84. "Verily We did make him mighty in the earth, and We granted him the means (of access) to every thing.
- 85. "So he followed a course."

Ali-ibn-Abitalib (as) taught a young man from Balkh a supplication, the Mashlul Supplication, wherein he says:

"O He Who helped Zul-Qarnayn against the tyrannical kings (to overcome them)!"

Again, a tradition from him (as) denotes that Zul–Qarnayn is the one who has the sign of kingdom and prophecy, and who is aware of every thing so that he recognizes the right from wrong; and Allah caused the cities and hearts to be submitted to him.2

Zul-Qarnayn and Solayman (Solomon) were two believers who governed the earth, and Nebuchadnezzar (Bukht-un-Nasr) and Namrood were two disbelievers who governed the earth, too.3

The power which Allah (s.w.t.) gives to His saints, (such as Solayman, Yusuf, and some believers) is for using it in Allah's way.

Concerning the good servants of Allah, the Qur'an says:

"(They are) those who if We establish them in the land, keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and enjoin right and forbid wrong..."4

The holy Qur'an also criticizes those who use their power alongside the way of evil, where it says:

"Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them, whom We had established in the earth...?"

They used to misuse their power and governnment. 5

The verse itself says:

"Verily We did make him mighty in the earth, and We granted him the means (of access) to every thing.

Upon the commentary of the second verse mentioned in the above, it has been cited that Allah gave Zul-Qarnayn both power and government in the earth, and he tried to improve the earth. It has been narrated from Hadrat Ali (as) who said:

"Allah made clouds timid for him in a manner that he could ride on it; and He granted him the means of everything; and He made everywhere bright for him so that the night and the day became the same for him. This is the meaning of making him mighty in the earth." 6

Thus, the verse means that Allah also gave him a knowledge to perform any affair by means of its course in order to obtain his aim. And, he followed the courses that Allah had taught him to reach the aim, including that he took the way of West to pave.

The verse says:

"So he followed a course."

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 86

86. "Until when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring and he found by it a people. We said: 'O' Zul-Qarnayn! Either you chastise them or you take a way of kindness among them?"

In this holy verse, the Qur'an implies that Zul-Qarnayn went on his journey as far as the end of the habitable places where there was not any more flourished land after that. This does not mean that he reached the site of setting the sun, because none reaches there.

In that place, he felt that the sun was setting in a muddy and dark spring, although, in fact, it was hiding behind that spring, since the sun does not set in water, it is in the sky. If a person is in the seashore or on the sea when the sun is setting, he feels that the sun is setting in the water of the sea, but neither of them is true.

The purpose of the Arabic phrase /'aynin hami'ah/ is 'a muddy spring' while the purpose of the Qur'anic phrase /'aynin hamiyah/ is 'a spring of hot water'. However, the Qur'anic term /hami'ah/ is used for 'some bad smelling mud' and 'Some hot mud'.

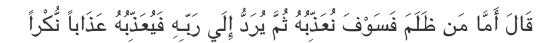
Ka'b has said that he recited in the Turah that the sun was setting in the mud and water.

The verse says:

"Until when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring and he found by it a people. We said: 'O' Zul-Qarnayn! Either you chastise them or you take a way of kindness among them?"

This part of the holy verse indicates that the people whom Zul–Qarnayn saw by that spring were heathens, therefore the Lord orders him to kill them, or to take them captives and train them.

Surah Al-Kahf - Verses 87 - 88



وَأُمَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحاً فَلَهُ جَزَآءً الْحُسْنَى وَسَنَقُولُ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْراً

- 87. "He said: 'As for him who is unjust we will chastise him, then he shall be returned to his Lord and He will chastise him with a grievous chastisement'."
- 88. "But as for him who believes and does righteousness, for him shall be a goodly reward, and we will assign easiness for him by our command."

The duty of a godly leader and governor is execution of justice, and struggling against injustice, and making the social regulations easy.

That was why Zul-Qarnayn warned people in such a manner that the verse says:

"He said: 'As for him who is unjust we will chastise him, then he shall be returned to his Lord and He will chastise him with a grievous chastisement'."

Such cruel and tyrannical people taste both the punishment of this world and the chastisement of the next world.

The person who believes and does righteous deeds, will be given a good reward. He will be faced with kindness and pleasant words, then his duties will not be hard and heavy, and he will not be forced to give heavy taxes.

It seems that the purpose of Zul-Qarnayn from this statement is a hint to this meaning that people, regarding his invitation to Unity and Faith, which is standing against injustice and corruption, will be divided into two groups. Those who accept that godly and constructive program will surely be rewarded a good recompense, and will live in a state of security and ease.

But, those who reject that invitation with enmity, and continue their faithlessness, injustice, and corruption, will be punished.

The verse says:

"But as for him who believes and does righteousness, for him shall be a goodly reward, and we will assign easiness for him by our command."

However, the Qur'anic term /man zalama/ (he who is unjust), which has occurred in contrast with the holy phrase /man'amana wa 'amila salihan/ (he who believes and does righteousness), indicates that the word /zulm/ in this verse means 'infidelity' and also means 'impious deed', which is amongst the bitter fruits of the evil tree of 'disbelief'.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 89 – 91

- 89. "Then he followed (another) course."
- 90. "Until when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising upon a people for whom We had appointed no shelter therefrom.
- 91. "So (it was), and We encompassed in knowledge whatever was with him."

After his journey to the West and establishing a just religious system there among the inhabitants of the seaside, Zul-Qarnayn made a journey toward the East, too.

The holy verse says:

"Then he followed (another) course."

Zul-Qarnayn continued his journey until when he reached the last flourishing point of that land, where there was no mountain, no tree, and no building.

When the sun rose there, the existing people of that place did refuge into depths of water and places of refuge, and when the sun set, they came out and began working. The purpose of the sentence saying 'they had not any canopy save the sun', is that they lived with passing their lives primitively and without facilities.

As Imam Baqir (as) and Imam Sadiq (as) said, they did not know how to build a house, nor did they how to sew. The sun was shining upon them directly and without any barrier, in a manner that their faces had become black. 7

The verse says:

"Until when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising upon a people for whom We had appointed no shelter therefrom.

Yes, it was such the affair of Zul-Qarnayn, and Allah was well aware of the means he had for the progression of his aims, and the forces, the arms and the troops Zul-Qarnayn possessed.

The verse says:

"So (it was), and We encompassed in knowledge whatever was with him."

In other words, Allah (s.w.t.) was aware of the works of Zul-Qarnayn, and, before he could do anything and reach any place, Allah knew his fate and taught him and lead him what to do. Thus, Allah admires the actions of Zul-Qarnayn and He shows that He is pleased with his deeds.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verses 92 – 93

- 92. "Then he followed (another) course."
- 93. "Until when he reached between the two barriers (of mountains) he found on the hither side of the two (mountains) a people scarcely able to understand a saying."

The leader of people should inspect every place and be aware of the circumstances of the affairs of those people under his leadership.

The needs and the facts will not be recognized for a person unless there is struggle and research.

And, fundamentally, serving the deprived is a value with Allah, whether they are civilized or not.

In this verse, the Qur'an points to another journey of the journeys of Zul-Qarnayn and implies that after that event, he utilized the important mean he had in his possession.

The verse says:

"Then he followed (another) course."

Zul-Qarnayn continued his way until he reached between two mountains. In that place he found a group of people who were different from those formerly couple of groups. These very people could not speak and understand any word.

The verse says:

"Until when he reached between the two barriers (of mountains) he found on the hither side of the two (mountains) a people scarcely able to understand a saying."

This meaning denotes that he reached a hilly region where he met a group of people who were in a very low level from the point of civilization, because one of the clearest signs of civilization is language.

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 94

94. "They said: 'O' Zul-Qarnayn! Verily Gog and Magog make mischief in the earth, so may we assign to you a tribute so that you set up a barrier between us and between them?"

The Arabic word /xiraj/ means 'the thing which come out of the earth', and /xarj/ is applied for 'what comes out of the wealth'.

The commentators and historians, attaching to the existing relationships, say that the objective meaning of Gog and Magog is the very tribes of Mogul and TaTar.8

An Islamic tradition, narrated from Amir-ul-Mu'Mineen Ali (as), denotes that he said Zul-Qarnayn found a people who told him:

"The Gog and Magog tribe are behind this mountain. They attack at the season of harvest and plunder all the corns and fruits or destroy them. Shall we assign a yearly tribute in order that you might erect a barrier?"9

This communication of theirs with Zul-Qarnayn might be done through some signs, nods, winks or any other mute sign, because, at least, they did not understand the language of Zul-Qarnayn.

The verse says:

"They said: 'O' Zul-Qarnayn! Verily Gog and Magog make mischief in the earth, so may we assign to you a tribute so that you set up a barrier between us and between them?"

Surah Al-Kahf - Verses 95 - 97

قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَاعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْماً

95. "He said: '(the power) in which my Lord has established me is better (than your tribute), so help me with strength (of men). I will make a barrier between you and between them'."

96. "'Bring me pieces of iron'. Until, when he had leveled up (the gap) between the two cliffs, he said: 'Blow!' Until, when he had made it (as) fire, he said: 'Bring me molten copper to pour thereon'."

97. "So they (Gog and Magog) were not able to scale it nor could they make a hole in it."

The Arabic word /radm/ is used for 'closing a gap'; the term /sadaf/ means: 'side, edge'; the molten copper in Arabic is called /qitr/; and the Qur'anic term /zubur/ means: 'some large pieces of iron'.

Imam Sadiq (as) in a tradition said:

"Precautionary dissimulation can be a barrier between you and your opponents which is not climbable, or penetrable." 10

But, in answer to them, Zul-Qarnayn said such like:

"He said: '(the power) in which my Lord has established me is better (than your tribute), so help me with strength (of men). I will make a barrier between you and between them'."

Then, Zul-Qarnayn ordered them as follows:

"Bring me pieces of iron'..."

When the pieces of iron were made ready, he issued the order of arranging them over each other.

The verse continues saying:

"... Until, when he had leveled up (the gap) between the two cliffs..."

The third order Zul-Qarnayn issued was that they should bring some material from wood and the like of

it to be burnt, and put them in both sides of the barrier, and by means of what they had with them, they would blow in the fire, so that the pieces of iron became red and rather melted.

The verse, concerning Zul-Qarnayn's order, says:

"...he said: 'Blow!' Until, when he had made it (as) fire..."

By that way, in fact, Zul-Qarnayn wanted to join the pieces of iron into each other in order to make a solid barrier. By that amazing design, he did the same thing that is practically done today by welding.

Finally, he issued the last order as follows:

"...he said: 'Bring me molten copper to pour thereon'."

Thus, he overlaid that iron collection, the barrier, with a cover of copper in order to protect it from penetration of weather and decay. He made such a barrier, at last, that the Gog and Magog could not climb and they were not able to make a hole in it either.

The verse says:

"So they (Gog and Magog) were not able to scale it nor could they make a hole in it."

Surah Al-Kahf – Verse 98

98. "He said: 'This is mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it level (with the ground), and the promise of my Lord is ever true'."

Godly men believe that their successes are because of the Mercy of Allah, and they never become proud. Of course, the Mercy and Lordship of Allah are connected to each other. Saintliness of work and effort, stability of the action, people's cooperation, administratorship and industry, and high goals are all a collection of Divine Favours.

Thus, here, Zul-Qarnayn, who was a godly man and had fulfilled a very important accomplishment, did not boast of his action nor did he hold those people under obligation in the same way that the tyrant usually do, but with the utmost courtesy he treated, and:

"He said: 'This is mercy from my Lord..."

Zul-Qarnayn implied that if he had such a knowledge by which he could perform an important action like

that, it was from the side of Allah, and his power as well as effectiveness of his word, were from Him, too.

Then he added this meaning that they should not think that their barrier was eternal, but when the promise of Allah comes, it will be made level with the ground and He will change it into an even land, because the promise of Allah is always true.

The verse say:

"... But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it level (with the ground), and the promise of my Lord is ever true'."

In this statement, Zul-Qarnayn points to the distraction of the world and its disturbance at the threshold of Resurrection.

There are many instructive points in this story, the which, in fact, form the essential aim of the Qur'an. Some of them are as follows:

- 1. The first lesson that this story teaches us is that no work is possible to be fully done in this world without its means. Therefore, Allah gave the means of success to Zul-Qarnayn.
- 2. No government can embrace the victory but with encouraging the helpful people and punishing the evildoers. This is the very principal which Zul-Qarnayn utilized. Ali-ibn-Abitalib (as), in his famous command to Malik-i-Ashtar, which is a consistent instruction for action in governing a country, says:
- "...The virtuous and the vicious should not be in equal position before you, because this means dissuasion of the virtuous from virtue and persuasion of the vicious to vice."11
- 3. A difficult duty is never fit for a godly just government, and it was for this very reason that Zul–Qarnayn, after declaring that he would punish the unjust and reward the righteous a good recompense, he added:

"... we will assign easiness for him by our command",

so that the righteous could be able to do it willingly and eagerly.

- 4. A vast just government cannot be heedless unto the differences and varieties of the life of people and their different conditions.
- 5. Zul-Qarnayn did not leave out even the group of people who, as the Qur'an says, could not understand a saying, and by any possible means, he listened to them and removed their difficulty.
- 6. Security is the first and the most important condition of a safe social life. It was for the same reason that Zul-Qarnayn undertook the most labourous works to provide it with them.

7. Another lesson which can be learnt from this historical event, is that the main owners of social pain must take part in performing their own affairs, because their effort will surely be affective.

Principally, an action which proceeds with the participation of the essential owners of the pain both helps the innate talents to be appeared and they value the resulting consequence and try to protect it, for they have tolerated much trouble in its construction.

However, it makes clear that even a nation in the state of being retarded can practically prove such an important and marvelous development when they apply a right design and administratorship.

- 8. A godly leader must be disrespectful to wealth and material things and be content with what Allah has bestowed upon him. One of the concepts which is found frequently in the Qur'an is that one of most basic statements of the divine prophets is that they demand no wage or wealth from people for their invitation to truth.
- 9. To secure the affairs from any point of view is another lesson of this Qur'anic story.
- 10. Howsoever powerful, vigorous, clever, wealthy and authoritative a person may be, and can afford great works, he must never boast and become proud. This is also another lesson that Zul-Qarnayn taught.
- 11. Every thing will be vanished, and the firmest and strongest buildings of this world will finally be destroyed even though they are built from some massive iron and steel.

This is the last lesson of this event, a lesson for all those who imagine that this world is eternal, and practically try to amass wealth and earn ranks so unconditioned and greedily that as if there is no death and destruction.

Who Were Gog and Magog?

Gog and Magog are mentioned in two suras of the Qur'an. One of them is in the Surah under discussion, and the second is in Surah Al-'Anbiya', No. 21, verse 96.

The verse of the Qur'an clearly shows that these two appellations had belonged to two wild, cruel tribes, who were very troublesome for the people who lived around the center of their living place. For more explanation about them, please refer to: commentary books of Atyab-ul-Bayan, Tafsir-i-Nemunah, Tafsir-i-Kabir, Qara'ib-ul-Qur'an, and Tafsir-i-Ruh-ul-Bayan.

Surah Al-Kahf - Verses 99 - 101

وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذِ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَرْضاً

الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَآءٍ عَن ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا لاَ يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَمْعاً

99. "And on that day, We shall leave some of them (people) surge against others, and the Trumpet will be blown, then We shall gather them (all) together."

100. "And on that day, We shall present Hell to the disbelievers exposed (to their view)."

101. "Those whose eyes were under a cover from My remembrance, and they could not bear to hear (the Truth)."

Adapting to the discussion of the perfect destruction of Zul-Qarnayn's barrier at the threshold of Resurrection which was mentioned before, here, the Qur'an continues explaining the Day of Hereafter and says:

"And on that day, We shall leave some of them (people) surge against others..."

The usage of the term /yamuj/ (surge) in the verse is either because of the abundance of people in that scene, or for the anxiety and horror that invade the entity of human beings on that day. It seems that their bodies surge like the waves of water.

Then the Qur'an continues saying:

"...and the Trumpet will be blown, then We shall gather them (all) together."

From the totality of the verses of the holy Qur'an it is understood that at the end of this world and at the beginning of the coming world, there will happen two great revolutionary events. The first event is the destruction of all human beings and the living creatures in a sudden happening.

The second event is the resurrection of the dead in another sudden occurrence. This event is not known how long after the first happening will occur. These two happenings are referred to in the Qur'an as /nafx-i-sur/ (blown of Trumpet).

After that, the holy Qur'an states the situation of the disbelievers, both the fate of their deeds and the qualities which cause that fate.

It says as follows:

"And on that day, We shall present Hell to the disbelievers exposed (to their view)."

The Hell, with its various chastisements and different painful punishments, appears before them

completely clear. This very manifestation of Hell before them and their observation itself is a dreadful punishment for them, still less that they be involved in it.

Who Are Disbelievers & Why Do They Have Such a Fate?

The holy Qur'an introduces the disbelieves in a very short sentence as follows:

"Those whose eyes were under a cover from My remembrance, and they could not bear to hear (the Truth)."

In fact, they had made unserviceable the most important means of truth-seeking, recognition of facts, and whatever causes the factor of happiness and wretchedness of man.

Yes, the feature of Truth is manifest and all the things of this world speak with man through mute tongue, but only there should exist a hearing ear and a seeing eye in him.

Upon the commentary of the holy phrase:

"... whose eyes were under a cover from My remembrance...",

it has been narrated that Imam Rida (as) told Ma'mun:

"The objective meaning of the word / likr/ in this verse is Ali-ibn-Abitalib (as)" 12

- 1. Nur-uth-Thqalayn, the commentary, and Kamal-ud-Din-i-Saduq
- 2. The Commentary of Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
- 3. The Commentary of Nur-uth-Thagalayn
- 4. Surah Al-Hajj, No.22, verse 41
- 5. Surah Al-'An'am, No. 6, verse 6
- 6. (Majma'-ul-Bayan, vol. 15, P. 119)
- 7. Commentary of Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
- 8. Tatary
- 9. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
- 10. Tafsir-i-Nur-uth-Thaqalayn
- 11. Nahjul-Balaqah, letter No. 53
- 12. Tafsir-i-Lahiji

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