

Zol-qarnain in the Quran is Cyrus the Great

Contributed by Akbar Nemati

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Much information, concerning the historical figure renowned, among Western people, for virtue and humanity emanates from two reliable sources, the Bible and Herodotus written in 5th Cent. BC. It is proclaimed that Cyrus was the first legislative who issued a number of principles in terms of human rights.

Having defeated the Medes, he founded Achaemenid dynasty as the first Persian Emperor. Based on some narratives of the Old Testament, Cyrus captured Babel, with the aid of God, set free the Jewish detainees and let them go back to Jerusalem.

Some interpreters believe that in Quran, Zol-gharnein refers to "Alexander the Great", while some others, comparing some verses of Quran pertinent to Zol-gharnein and Cyrus' life story, assume that God meant "Cyrus the Great" and no one else.

In the holy Qur'an, there are 16 verses in the Kahf Sureh (verses 83-98) that talk about Zol-qarnain and some aspects of his personality. Zol-qarnain of the holy Qur'an is NOT Alexander the Great. It is Cyrus the Great, the famous Persian king of the Achaemenid Dynasty (580-529BC). Consider the following: 1- Alexander was not a monotheistic man. He was a blasphemer who worshipped the many gods of Ancient Greece. The Biography of Alexander, written by a famous Greek historian (Herodotus) states that Alexander believed that he was the son of Zeus! The Qur'an's Zol-qarnain was God-revering and a monotheist, and so was Cyrus. As the most probable date for the appearance of Zoroaster is in the mid-sixth century B.C., this date is close to the time Cyrus lived.

2- Cyrus is mentioned in the Old Testament and the Book of Ezra as a God-revering person, a description that matched the qualities of Zol-qarnain in the Qur'an.

3- The deeds of the Achaemenian king were in accordance to the deeds described in the Qur'an, as he fought with the Lydians in Asia Minor and then with the Sakas in the east (unlike Alexander the Great).

4- The Koranic verses in the 'AL KAHF' sura, which talk about Zol-qarnain, begin with the words: "And they ask you about Zol-qarnain..". Meaning that the Jews are asking the Prophet Muhammad about him. This means that this king was known to the Jews, and is mentioned in the Old Testament. Alexander the Great is not mentioned in the Old Testament, nor did he have any close relation with the Jews.

5- Zol-qarnain in the Qur'an is said to have built a barrier of copper and iron after fighting the Ya'jooj and Ma'jooj people. Cyrus built a similar barrier in the Daryal Pass, the remains of which are still existing.

6- "qarn" in Arabic has two meanings: "horn" and "century". "Zol-qarnain" could literally mean in Arabic: "The man of two horns" or "The man of two centuries". This "one word having multiple meanings" but Cyrus Relief, in Pasargadae shows The man of two horns.!

7- Cyrus is a personality mentioned in the Bible, i.e the Old Testament (the Book of Daniel, the Book of Ezra and some other books where Cyrus is referred to in very explicit terms: Daniel dreamt that in the palace of Susa in Elam, a two-horned ram triumphed over all animals, with the exception of a one-horned goat that finally defeated the ram. Daniel lost consciousness after this dream and an angel appeared to him, saying that the ram he had seen was the king of the Medes and the Persians, while the one-horned goat was the king of the Greeks) (Book of Daniel, chapter 8, verses 20-21).

Zol-gharnein was a merciful king who was kind to inferiors which is true of Cyrus the Great to the extent that even his enemies revered him. He was the one who issued the Charter of Liberty and Human Rights in Babel.