

## **Cyrus the Great Parallelism with Zolqarnein (Interpretation of Verses 82 - 97 of Surah al-Kahf in Holy Quran)**

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### **Abstract**

Jews of Medina once asked Prophet Muhammad about a man named Zolqarnein. Verses 82 to 97 of Surah al-Kahf, the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the holy Qur'an, give description about this king who believed in God and the Day of Judgment. According to these Verses, God provided opportunities for Zolqarnein to be victorious over his enemies and bring justice to the territory under his jurisdiction. These Verses do not mention the place, time, or his name, and Zolqarnein that is his title has been referred as Qarnayem in Jewish Pentateuch. These uncertain issues have caused many commentators of the Qur'an and Islamic scholars to introduce different individuals as Zolqarnein. Among these, Cyrus, the Achaemenid king and Alexander, the Macedonian king, could be seen more than others. This study aims to determine the character of Zolqarnein, by taking the historical approach. For that matter, religious and historical documents such as the Quran, Torah, Cyrus Charter, and writings of classical Greek historians were studied and corroborated with archaeological evidences. Based on the results of preceding studies, Zolqarnein is found to be Achaemenid king, Cyrus the Great.

**Keywords:** Zolqarnein, Quran, Torah, Cyrus the Great Alexander the Great.

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## **Introduction**

According to Islamic sources, a number of Jews approached Prophet Muhammad to challenge and inquire him about the nature of Zolqarnein. They did this with the hope that the prophet would not be able to respond and give them an excuse for what they called his false prophecy. Jews who knew Zolqarnein very well through their religious books, turned silent after getting a plausible response, and this means that they accepted the explanation of Prophet Muhammad. Verses 82 to 97 of Chapter al-Kahf of the Qur'an, reflect the response of the Prophet of Islam to the Jews.

Not stating the time, place and ethnicity of Zolqarnein as well as his name caused the Islamic writers and commentators of the Quran to identify him differently. As a result, dozens are mentioned as Zolqarnein. Since the verification of the behavior and actions of all these people, mostly from the Arab sheikhs and princes are not consistent with the image and actions of Zolqarnein, and on the other hand, makes the text too long; we are not going through their traits and behaviors here. Some of the kings of Yemen, such as Musab ibn Abdullah, Saab ibn Dhi Almrayd, Tab Alaqrn, Asad al-Kamil, Shamar Yar-ash, as well as Fereydoon, son of Abtin and a Chinese king are in this collection.

## **Appellation of Zolqarnein**

Prior to this, we need to explore the appellation of the word "Zolqarnein", that in fact, was the title of a just king. Since Jews raised the name of the person, it is logical that the Arabic word, Zolqarnein should have a Hebrew equivalent as well. The word "gharn" [corn] is mentioned several times in the Torah and almost everywhere means "horn". One of them is the visit of Daniel,

chapter eight, verse 3 of Daniel's dream. "So I lifted up my eyes behold a ram which had two long horns was at the sight of the river" (Daniel, 2012: 901). In the Hebrew text, the word Qarnayym (Qarnaim) is used for this person, which means two horns. In the Hayem Hebrew dictionary, this term means horn, power, pride and arrogance as well as the radius and beam (Bahrami, 2011: 233-4).

Indeed, why the Jews asked this question to the Prophet? Had they just heard the name of the Zolqarnein and had no knowledge of him? Did they sincerely wanted the Prophet to let them know about this person? Or that Zolqarnein was completely familiar and well known in their history and culture and hence their question was a way to assay the Prophet. If we accept the latter case, then the term Zolqarnein, should be interpreted and explained according to historical and religious texts of Jews.

Among all those Zolqarnein candidates, the name of Alexander, the Macedonian king and Cyrus the Great catch the eyes more than others. Therefore, we try to verify the attitude and actions of these two, after reading Verses 82 to 97 of Surah al-Kahf. Three of the Zolqarnein's battleships is mentioned in these Verses. On the first war trip, he travels to west and fights with the heathen ethnic near a sea with opaque water (Black Sea) and walks over them. Then for the second war, embarks on a journey to the east and fights against people who did not have housing and harbors and on his third trip, he reaches to the mountainous region whose inhabitants have a difficult language and also are under attack of aggressive and wild people called Gog and Magog. They asked Zolqarnein to prevent the invasion of Gog and Magog by building a strong barrier on their arrival path. Zolqarnein of wealth

and power (military force and sufficient equipment) fulfilled their practical demands.

If we have a clear look at Alexander's war trips, we will realize that his first great expedition was from the west (Greece) to the east (Asia Minor and the Levant), respectively. Then he went to the south (Egypt) and seized the land. Then moved from Egypt and then re-crossing the eastern edge of the Mediterranean and the Levant, moved toward Susa, the Achaemenid capital and after defeating Darius III seized Achaemenid centers one after another and finally, accessed the Indus (the easternmost point). He never fought with off-road and non-sedentary people (Scythian) and did not build a barrier in the Northern Highlands to prevent the entry of Gog and Magog (Scythian). Thus, Alexander's war efforts didn't have any consistency with Zolqarnein military expedition.

In Surah al-Kahf, Zolqarnein is introduced as a Unitarian man, a believer in God and the resurrection. A righteous, kind, and generous king who not only were not interested to occupy a bit of wealth over the conquered lands; but also provides the conquered with financial assistance. But Alexander believed in multiple masters and multiple Greek gods, he did not believe in the only and one God. During his expeditions to Asian countries did not show any mercy and killed all opponents and those who stood in front of him. In addition, the wealth of these regions were captured and sent to Greece. Even after the capture of Susa, its treasures including lots of gold and silver was sent to Greece on several thousand horses. Pirnia (2005, Vol. 2: 1002), quoting Plutarch states that Alexander was very greedy and aspiring. He had strong religious belief and made great sacrifices for Greek goddess [possibly Athena or

Artemis]. He was temperamental and became furious easily. He had 360 spouse after his conquests in Asia. After each conquest, he banquets. He was into drinking and drunkenness and were so focused and immersed in pleasure objects who died according to the same practices and intemperance (Ibid: 1006).

Pre-Islamic Iranians used the term Alexander Gojastak (cursed and evil) because of his violent, destructive and anti-religious behavior. "Ancient Persian texts and religious traditions such as the book of divine wisdom, the records of Ardeshir Papkan, Tansar letter, cities of Iran pamphlet, Dinkard and Book of Arda Viraf introduced Alexander as an evil person, harlot, destroyer, the-enemy of Iranshahr and predatory who burned the Holy Book in the pool chamber and overthrew the dynasty of Kayanids" (Erfanmanesh, 2010: 98-99).

Not matching war trips, ideology and character of Alexander with Zolqarnein, we'll now study the second character.

Cyrus in 546 B.C. headed the west to confront with the sudden influx of Lydian army that was trying to conquer Cappadocia and eventually managed to capture Sardis. Croesus was captured by Cyrus and he refused to burn him. He ordered to open his provisions, sat next to him and regarded him with great respect and admiration, treated him like courtiers and told his guards to prevent the soldiers from looting the city (Herodotus, 1983: 71).

The first campaign of Cyrus overlaps with the first war drive of Zolqarnein to the West. Chapter al-Kahf states that "Zolqarnein came to the West, the place that the sun is hidden in a dark water fountain" (Qur'an, Surah al-Kahf: Verse 84). Lydia was a rich country, located on the west side of Achaemenid state and the Black Sea was on

the North and North West of it. Since the sediments of the sea is black and opaque, water appears dark. That's why it has been nicknamed as the Black Sea. According to this verse, Zolqarnein faces a group of unbelievers in this area. According to Herodotus, they worshiped Croesus the Greek gods, especially Apollo. He sent numerous presents to temples for the favor of the gods especially temple of Delphi in order to won the war against Cyrus. Among the offerings were three thousand sacrifices of all kind of animals, one hundred and seventeen gold columns and a golden lion (Herodotus, 1983: 56). In this verse, God empowered Zolqarnein to deal with these people and their king as he desired (for violence and retribution or mercy). "Zolqarnein then said that anyone who have wronged, will be punished. But the main punishment of unjust will be by God in the hereafter and if one believes, will have the best of rewards and we won't be hard on him." (Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf, Verses 86-87).

As mentioned in the history of Herodotus, Cyrus not only didn't punish Croesus, but appointed him as his adviser for the rest of his life and gave Sardis to his people. Zolqarnein in this verse says, "But whoever believes in God and be righteous, will receive the best rewards". This verse can be compared to this part of the statement of Herodotus about Croesus. "Cyrus asked Croesus: Who encouraged you to strike our land, Croesus replied: Oh, King, what I did was for the benefit of you and hurt myself. If there is a blame, it is for the Greek gods that encouraged me to start a war" (Herodotus, 1983: 71). This response suggests that Croesus was remorseful and understood that the Greek gods were wrong for encouraging him to start the war.

Verses 88 to 90 of Surah al-Kahf talks about the second Zolqarnein chase. "(88) Again pursued with the same equipment (89) until he reached to the East land. He found people in there that we did not put between them and the sun even a shelter (90) It was as described and of course we were fully aware of the circumstances" (Quran, Surah Al-Kahf, Verses 89-90).

Cyrus, after returning from the Anatolian peninsula and the brilliant victories over the Lydia and the Greek world of the East Mediterranean as well as strengthen the financial power, decided to consolidate the unrest that the eastern borders of its territory was facing with and also put the ethnic rebels on their place. Cyrus arrived near the Oxus River on his battleship and the areas of the Oxus to Gandhara, located in the valley of the Kabul River was under his command. Then crossed the Oxus and captured the Sughd province that its capital was Markandeh (Samarkand) and brought the massaget people (massaget), near the river Oxus, who used to attack the northeastern borders, under his command (Bayani, 2002: 100).

The third movement of Zolqarnein, like his second movement is consistent with the actions of Cyrus the Great. As previously mentioned, Scythian tribes were distributed from the eastern regions of the Aral Sea (Chinese Turkestan) to the Danube River in Europe. These tribes used to interfere Iran in two ways. From the North East and the Caucasus Corridor. The influx of foreign nations through this corridor throughout the Kingdom of the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian and especially Sassanid was troublesome and it was very expensive for Iranian kings to maintain Caucasus canyon. This time Cyrus moved to this area. According to Xenophon, Cyrus, with the

help of Armenians after the defeat of the Chaldeans (Scythians) asked Tigran (Prince of Armenia) to send a messenger to his father to move and bring as many builders, carpenters and equipment as he could, quickly to build the fort, and thereby build a strong fortress in the Caucasus mountains with the help of Armenians and Chaldeans.

When his troops brought him some enemy soldiers in chains, he ordered to open the restrains from their feet and called upon doctors to treat them. Then he told the Chaldeans that he did not come to fight and destroy them, but his intention was reconciliation between the Chaldeans and Armenians. Then Cyrus freed them all. After the peace, the king of Armenia, told Cyrus: I was more than willing to pay simply again and again, the taxes you receive from us to drive Chaldeans out of our highlands. After this victory, Armenians, kings' family and the country grandee, brought lots of money and gifts for Cyrus the Great. After rejecting Gifts, Cyrus said these battleships are a blessing for me and I don't need any approval apart from discipline and benediction. Do not hide this wealth, make a life full of peace and honor for yourselves (Xenophon, 2005: 80-85).

According to the above, the writings of Xenophon is in full compliance with Verses 90 to 97 of Surah al-Kahf. Here, we need to point out a few things to help better understand the issue. In verse 92, it is said that Zolqarnein arrived to the mountainous region that did not understand a word. Languages spoken in the Caucasus Mountains region, are one of the most difficult ones. It is very difficult to learn and understand the Georgian language and despite repeated hearing of the names of some Georgian political figures from the mass media, we are less able to understand

and learn these names. Since their language was not of Aryan language family, they didn't understand Cyrus and the Iranian language.

Zolqarnein refused to accept any financial assistance to build the dam (fort) and asked only for the equipment (iron and lead) and physical strength to help him. Cyrus also rejected any financial assistance from Armenians and only called for the builders, carpenter, and equipment from them (Zolqarnein engaged in the construction of the dam (Fortress) with the help of local people using stone and iron, and poured molten copper on stones and iron) "verse 95".

The latter is one of the most interesting and most amazing Verses of Surah Kahf consistent with Achaemenid architecture, especially the time of Cyrus the Great. Those who are familiar with archaeological monuments of Pasargadae Achaemenid period or have seen the Pasargadae at close quarters, know that one of the main characteristic of Achaemenid architecture is the use of stone and iron. Achaemenian, in making some great and important buildings, used a lot of massive stone blocks, thick cuttings and rocky parts. Since mortar cannot be used to connect cleanly shaven massive stones, usually dry stack and iron staple is used. In this method, holes need to be created in 10 cm from the edges of two adjacent pieces of rocks with hand drills. Then a clamp (fastener) that looks like stapler needle is placed inside the two holes. To make it secure and robust inside the two holes, some molten lead was poured on the sides of each iron rods (clamp) that there was some empty space around them and also on its main body. There are different forms of iron staples and swallowtail staple is one of the most famous in archeology of

this period (Fig. 1). Many examples of these staples can be found in the stone pieces and columns in the Levee palace of Pasargadae. In addition, the Achaemenid used the lead as mortars for connecting rock fragments (Fig. 2).

Verse 95 of Surah al-Kahf says: "Then ordered to get deep into the ground to reach the water and build a wall of iron and stone from the depth of the earth to the height of two mountains." Achaemenid dug earth and replaced its soft soil with sand pebbles before construction of the building. Engineers of this period used foundation and laying of spool as their strong principle of fortification for construction of their buildings. What obtained from the inscription of Darius, the Achaemenid king of Susa, indicate this fact:

"The matter that I used to build this palace at Susa, was brought from very distant, it was dug down to the extent that I got stone from the ground. When we dug, the spool was poured. On the one hand the forty cubit, on the other hand twenty cubit in-depth. The palace was built on spool" (Lecoq, 2003: 282).

In verse 96 reads: "From then on, the people never broke it, never were on top of the dam or were able to penetrate it." Since Xenophon said both the Armenian and Chaldean people participated in the construction of the fort, it is logical for them to be diligent in maintaining it and not to damage or break it (Xenophon, op.cit).

Allama Tabatabai writes about the Zolqarnein dam: "In the region of the Caucasus, between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, there is a chain of mountains which like wall separates north from south. Dardanelles Strait is the only known strait in these wall-like mountains and there is only one ancient Iron wall in the same place, and

thereby, many believe that this dam is the Zolqarnein dam. It is interesting that in the nearby there is a river called Saeres which means Cyrus (the Greeks called Cyrus, Saeres). In the Armenian monuments, this wall called Bhag Gurayee which means the Crossing of Cyrus or the Strait of Cyrus, and all of these, show that the founder of the dam is Cyrus (Tabatabai, 1984: 664).

### **Zolqarnein and his Morphology**

In the book of Daniel, a ram was mentioned that was standing near the Olayy creek (Susa river that passes through the center of Susa) and had two horns. The word used here for "two horns" translated in Hebrew as "Qarnaim" that is exactly the same Arabic word "Zolqarnein" (Bahrami, 2011: 31). Naturally, the Jews who asked the Prophet Muhammad about the identity of Zolqarnein, used their own religious culture word and then it became the Arabic word "Zolqarnein". Apparently this has not been called up earlier in the Arabic culture and Jews with knowledge of the matter and their own Hebrew culture wanted to catch the Prophet in their Hebrew culture trap using the lack of information about this title in Arabic. In any case, Zolqarnein is a title has been used for a faithful prophetic king, which has two horns. But the name of this person is not mentioned in the Qur'an.

On a stone base in the northern gate of palace R in Pasargadae which belongs to Cyrus the Great, there is a stele remains which is a winged angel with four wings and his dress is of Elamite dress and has a special crest on its head that look like Horus god crowns in Egypt (Fig. 3).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was an inscription above it that was called: "I am Cyrus, the Achaemenid king" (Ghirshman, 1992: 132).

Wings and horns are the symbol of the divine. Wings are the sign of the flight and the rise in the highest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Getting away from the contaminated soil pollution, crime and chaos. Fly into the light, soul and source of creation who is clean and just. In light of the Qur'an and the monotheistic religions, the cherubim (angels) have wings and fly freely in the Paradise. Abu Rayhan Biruni wrote: "Umar suggests that he (Zolqarnein) is known to be an angel" (Biruni, 2007: 65).

The prophet Isaiah (2012: 738-9) described the Persian king, Cyrus like a bird of prey (Eastern eagle): "I, myself (Jehovah), raised Cyrus to follow my goal and carry out justice. I guide him to the right way. ... I summon someone from the East. He will come quickly like a bird of prey and will succeed to implement what I want". It is said that his flag was a golden eagle with open wings which was installed on a long spear. Xenophon quoted; when Cyrus and his father, Cambyses arrived to the Iranian border, they saw an eagle appeared at the right side of their camp and guided them. Cyrus and his father, praised gods and heroes who support and keep Pars safe (Xenophon, 2005: 45).

In the first and second millennium B.C., the winged-man and winged creatures' combination, bull-man, sphinx, Griffin, were abundant in ancient monuments of Assyrians, Babylonians, Urartu, Egypt, and Syria (Fig. 4). Archaeologists, art historians and religious writers place winged creatures in the group of angels, divine beings and extraterrestrials. These creatures are flying in the space between God/gods and humans and are waiting to run commandments of God/gods on earth at any time (like Michael, Gabriel, and Azrael). "Some believe that the winged angel is Cyrus himself and some

think the image belongs to the king Cyrus's Fravahar (spirit). But another group reject any connection between this figure and the founder of the Achaemenid Empire" (Shapur Shahbazi, 1970: 252). Faravashi (2000: 67-69), "Relates this figure to Cyrus himself. He believes that Achaemenid kings knew themselves to be connected to the race of gods and therefore found aspect of divinity and a sculpture who have been under the traditions of Mesopotamia, created Cyrus from stone in the form of life-saving angel and added traditional gods' wings on his shoulder". Perhaps the Sassanids are inherited the idea that "the King is the face of the gods", from the Achaemenids.

Horn is the symbol of strength, fertility, blessing and divinity. One of the distinctive characteristics of Elamite deities, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor etc. is the horned helmet that they wear. Winged man and winged bull designs on the main ports of their palaces has been adopted from Assyrian art and Palace of Sennacherib in particular. In the dream of the prophet Daniel that the word Qarnayym (two horns) is used, states: "In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar, I dreamed that in the city of Susa, the capital of Elam province, I was standing along the Olay River (current Susa). When I looked around, I saw a ram that had two long horns standing beside the river. Then I saw that one of the two horns became longer. The ram was butting to the west, north and south and no animal could stand against him or escape from him. He could get whatever he wanted, and became stronger. While I was thinking about these things, suddenly a goat came from the West. He ran so fast that his feet did not touch the ground. The goat had a horn in the middle of his eyes, and ran with all his power to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen it

beside the creek. The goat was extremely large, while it had reached the height of its power, his horn suddenly broke and instead, four horns at different directions appeared. ... When I tried to understand the meaning of my dream, suddenly someone stood in front of me. First, I heard the voice from the other side of the Olay river saying, "Gabriel, interpret Daniels' dream for him now." Then Gabriel came to me. I got scared and fell to the ground. He told me: "O Mortal man, the dream that you saw, is related to the afterlife".

The ram with two horns in your dream is the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Male goat is the Greece kingdom, and the great horn that was between his eyes is the first king of Greece. The four horns that replaced the middle horn, means that the Greek Empire will be four parts and each part will have an independent king. But none will be as large as the first king "(Daniel, 2012: 901-904).

The owner of the two horns ram in Daniel's dream, the person who created the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, and this person is none other than Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty that his mother was "Median" and his Father was "Persian". According to the dream of Daniel, Qarnaym (Zolqarnein) was butting (attacking) to the west, north and south. This theme is consistent to Verses 82 to 97 of Surah al-Kahf and proceedings of Cyrus. In addition, Daniel dreamed the king of Greece (Alexander) with one horn, and it is completely different with the Zolqarnein that has two horns. Prophet Daniel, who lived about two hundred years before Alexander, had predicted his victory and domination over the Achaemenid Empire.

Cyrus put a crown on the head, which was originally from Egypt and it goes back to the

Athef crown era (crown of the Egyptian god Osiris) and it was a cone decorated with ostrich feathers, perhaps it was a symbol of solar disk on the crown. In Egyptian mythology, symbol of the Roaring war called Hem Hemet and showed him crowned with three Athef crowns happened to be set up over two ram's horn (Shapur Shahbazi, 2000: 64).

Elamite deities long dress, two pairs of Assyrian God's wings and Phoenician God Baal, cherubim Bible and Ancient Egyptian deities, Osiris hats which forms the Cyrus elements of cover, specifies that Cyrus, not only respects the religion and beliefs of people under his nationality, but also he is the embodiment and religious representative of all the nations of the Middle East. Two sun-like orb that is located on both sides of the crown, reminiscent of the sun and its dominance of East and West of the world. Of course, this sun-like orb is consistent with the name of Cyrus. As Plutarch (2001: 191) noted that Cyrus had taken its name from the sun. Because the sun in the Persian language called "Cyrus".

### **Cyrus from the Eyes of United Subsidiaries**

When Cyrus in 539 B.C. entered into Babylon, small green branches, piles of straw and palm leaves fell in the path he took to welcome and pave his chariot. Peace prevailed all over the city and Cyrus sent greetings to the Babylonians (Mallowan, 1972: 9). Ordinary people who did not know about the sudden and immediate victory of the King, astonished and said: Marduk, the great lord of Babylon, asked Cyrus to overthrow Nabonidus and replace him (Mole et al, 2007: 395). Cyrus prevented his troops from the invasion of life, property and honor of the people. According to



Bakhturtash (1995: 42), Cyrus entered Babylon. But unlike conquerors before him, who entered into cities with evil catching glory, but with a great and heavenly glory. He didn't order a general massacre, or put fire to any house, didn't skinned, didn't burn boys and girls, didn't take eyes and tongues out and did not break a shin; but granted tranquility, peace and freedom to build the temple and to release captives from the prison dilemma.

Perhaps Bakhturtash opinion were considered exaggerated, according to his Iranian preconception. But thousands of written documents and archaeological evidences suggest that treatment of war-kings, generals and soldiers of those periods were different with the treatment of Cyrus and his army. Scenes like these inhuman atrocities can be found in Assyrian palaces (Fig. 5). In these monuments, cities and fortresses of the enemies were destroyed and burnt with different equipment. Men and enemy combat forces were massacred in the most heinous situation. They didn't have pity on the captives. Stripped and dragged them to crucify, sharp iron spears planted in the ground and then put enemies on the spears. Then skinned them while they were alive, cut their organs one by one and burnt them alive.

Men of distinction and elders were kept naked and tied to each other with rope. They were split with excrement and forced to walk from their township to the capital of Assyria or Babylon. Women and young girls were forced to do servitude and sexual slavery and sold out. All of their movable property and assets (livestock, metals, grains, etc.) were transferred to the capital and in the end, their land and gardens were torched and their canals and springs were destroyed. City temples were destroyed and

looted. Many inscriptions obtained from the Assyrian and Babylonian kings in the first millennium BC, make one familiar with the common war traditions in the area.

Ashour Nasirpal II, king of Assyria, in one of his inscriptions writes: "I burnt many captives with fire, and many others were brought into captivity. I cut the nose, ears and fingers of a number of them and blinded another group of them. I built a minaret out of live and another minaret out of the dead heads and hung the heads of the dead rebels on trees around the city. I burnt the youths and maidens in fire. Twenty men was captured alive and put in the wall of the palace. The rest of the fighters died of thirst in the Euphrates desert"(Roux, 1990: 281).

Let's see what evidences are left from Cyrus, related to the seizure of cities and foreign countries. So far, no visual effects (stele, seals ...) of inhumane treatment of Cyrus has been found. But the Babylon cylinder with Babylonian script and language is found. Cyrus issued some commands, not only for Babylonians, but also sent it to other territories after seizure of Babylon. Portions of the Cyrus Cylinder to be rewritten to compare with the declaration of the kings before him:

"... Cyrus treated black heads, fairly. Cyrus governed the country by truth and justice. Murdok, the great lord, was very happy with his way of backing up people with the joy of good deeds and good thoughts. Murdok decided for Cyrus to enter Babylon without war and bloodshed. People congratulated a leader who helped people and saved them from the clutches of death and sorrow and returned them to life. All the gods praised him and honored his name.

My great army entered into Babylon in peace. I did not allow any suffering to be incurred to the people of this city and this

country. I abolished slavery. I stopped their misfortune. I ordered that all people are free to worship their gods and nobody could mistreat them. I ordered that no one is allowed to kill anybody.

... And I rebuilt the ancient cities that had been destroyed at the other side of the Tigris. I ordered to open all the temples that had been closed. All the gods of these temples were returned to their places. And returned all the people who had been displaced and scattered to their positions. I reconstructed their destroyed houses. I called all people to unity ... "(Jaafari Zouj, 2008).

In this charter, Cyrus introduced himself a prophet and chosen from Marduk and other gods. He knows that Marduk chosen him to put the religion that Nabonidus, king of Babylon, diverted from its path, in the right away. Restore life to the people of Babylon and not only released the Babylonians under the Nabonidus oppression and slavery, but also returned Jews and other ethnic groups who were captured, to cities and their homes. "The king of Babylon, Nabonidus, king of the Medes, like Azhydhak and King Lady Croesus was not molested but was granted exile to Karmania (Kerman) and also a property was given to him" (Amelli, 1999: 43).

It may be said that Cyrus had attempted to write this Charter for advertising or to please his relatives and others. But the following statement left from Babylonian priests eliminates such claim.

"He (Marduk), looked to all countries in search of a just king who is close to his heart to guide him. At this time, he (Marduk) named Cyrus, king of Anshan and called him to rule the world. Threw Gutis and Umanmands (Median) under his feet. Marduk, the great advocate and supporter of

all his nation looked at Cyrus vivaciously. Sent his blessing to his just heart and to his actions and asked him to move to his city (Babylon). Became his leader just like a friend and a fellow. Entered him into Babylon without fighting and saved his hometown from any oppression. Entrusted King Nabonidus who disrespect toward Marduk, to him. All inhabitants of Babylon, Sumer and Akkad and elders and rulers, bowed Cyrus and kissed his feet "(Pirnia, 2005, Vol. 1: 335-6).

Cyrus introduced as prophet and chosen from Marduk in the declaration of Babylon priests. The one who is righteous and close to the heart of Marduk. Who has a justice seeking heart? After entering the city of Babylon, the locals welcomed him as the representative of Marduk and kissed his feet.

"The government and the power of Cyrus in Babylon was not viewed as an alien domination. He formally, took the kingship from the god of Babylon, Marduk and propoerly organized the ancient and sacred ceremones of Babylonians. Hence, Cyrus adopted the title "king of countries, king of Babylon" (Dandamayev, 1994: 145).

In 539 BC, Cyrus the Great invaded Babylon and after the fall of its government, freed Jews who were enslaved for 70 years in the country and led by Zorro Babel (Babylon Zufar), the great priest of Jews in Babylon went to Jerusalem. In addition, containers and stuff of Solomon's Temple were returned to their original position and provided financial assistance for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon from the state treasury. Cyrus and his successors created a spiritual government that priests and clergies of Israel ruled and handled it. The Land of Jerusalem was part of the great empire, until the end of the Achaemenid dynasty.

The work of Cyrus the great for saving the Jewish people and their religion, if wasn't greater than the work of Moses, it wasn't lesser than it. Moses freed Jews who were in fear, with great compassion, from the bondage of the Egyptians, Jews turned to the calf worshiping and were excluded from the religion of Moses. But Cyrus, not only freed the Jews from the captivity, placed them in comfort and safety, provided them with money and wealth and guided them to their land, but restored their religion that was going toward corruption and astray, to its actual position. Perhaps without his actions, the Jews and their religion was brought to ruin and profound deviation. Complain about bias, ignorance and religious guilt of the Jewish people and their punishment, has been stated in a number of books of this period.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra and Daniel, are among the prophets who directly or indirectly have pointed out Cyrus, the Persian king in their religious books. This section tries to excerpts from the content they point out about this important religious figure.

Isaiah lived about 130 years before the reign of Cyrus. Like most prophets of Israel, Isaiah predicted the future and he was inspired. In parts of his book, Isaiah says: "I command the oceans to dry up, (Chapter 44). I told Cyrus; you'll rule on my behalf. You'll do what I want you to do. You will order to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple foundation will be laid (Chapter 45). God has chosen Cyrus to be the king. God has appointed him to rule the nations and to take the kings off their thrones. God will open the gates of cities for him. The Lord tells Cyrus: I myself, will pave the way for you and will level the mountains and hills. I slipped down gates of bronze and iron

clones will split. I will give you the treasury and the treasures hidden in dark and secret places. Then you will know that I am the lord, the God of Israel, who has called you by name. I picked you up to help my servant Israel, the people I have chosen. I have given the honor to you, but you still do not know me.

... I have raised Cyrus to run my goal and to execute justice. I will make all his ways, the right way. He will rebuild and reconstruct my city, Jerusalem and will free the captives. No one reward or bribe him to do it.

(Chapter 46)... I summon someone from the East. He was like a bird of prey comes with fast speed and will succeed in implementing what I've asked. I have said it and it will be done as I have said"(Isaiah, 2012: 732-739).

In the words of Isaiah, there are some things to consider: 1-Cyrus is a king that the Lord, the God of the Jews, chosen to conquer nations and rebuild Jerusalem and its large temple. 2-Cyrus doesn't know the God of the Jews. The end of chapter 45 says: "I gave you the honor, although you still do not know me." That could mean that Cyrus didn't accept the Jewish religion and it's God, as some believe, as his official religion. 3-Cyrus didn't receive any bribes or wage to rebuild Jerusalem and release prisoners. This is in such a great fit with Verses 93 and 94. Surah al-Kahf. When Cyrus wanted to build a dam for northern residents, they offered money to him, but Zolqarnein refused and said, "The wealth that God has given me, is better than your costs". 4- In chapter 44, Cyrus has been mentioned as a bird of prey who comes from the East (Iran, was located on the east of Babylon and Jerusalem). It is also consistent with the flag of Cyrus which is in the form of a high-

flown eagle and his winged body at the entrance of the Pasargadae palace gate.

Ezra, another prophet of Israel, lived at the time of the first king of the Achaemenid Empire and after the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem. The first chapter of his book writes:

“In the first year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, God fulfilled what he had been promised by prophet Jeremiah and prompted Cyrus to issue the following command in writing and send it to all areas under his command to be read aloud to the people. This command is from Cyrus, king of Persia. The Lord, the God of heaven, has chosen me out to rule all the kings on the earth and to build a big temple in Jerusalem.

... Cyrus the king, returned all the bowls and cups that King Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the temple in Jerusalem to his own gods' temple"(Ezra, 2012: 363-4). Ezra has mentioned Cyrus as the king of Persia. Babylonian has mentioned him as king of Anshan and Cyrus mentioned himself as the Achaemenid king.

Daniel is one of the latest prophet of the Jewish people, who, rather than returning to Jerusalem, came to Susa along with Cyrus and achieved a prominent position in the administration of Cyrus and Darius. Dream of Daniel about Qarnyym (Zolqarnein) as a ram with two horns, previously described. Daniel's dream has foretold the disintegration of powerful and rich Achaemenid territories by the Greeks (Daniel, Chapters 6 to 12; 2012: 900-905).

Thus, the prophets of Israel, knew Cyrus as the king that God had chosen to return this confused people to their homeland and re-establish the Jewish religion. "Some believe that Cyrus intended to invade Egypt, and because the Jewish homeland was in the way to Egypt, the reason for liberation of the

Jews was to find faithful helpers among them. But Cyrus's fair behavior and moral foundations on other nations (Medes, Lydians, Armenians, Babylonian, etc.) prove that the liberation of Jews was more on ethical grounds "(Faravashi, 1991: 58). Even if Cyrus had such an intention, why did not invade Egypt. He lived ten years after the liberation of the Jewish people. In addition, a person like Cyrus, who had lots of power and wealth and had overthrown three huge empires didn't need a small and captured nation like Jews.

Xenophon who is one of the three great Achaemenid historians, has admired Cyrus and introduced him as a perfect model of a statesman, a moralist, experienced and wise commander, pious and godly man, a kind father, fair-minded justice.... He writes that his behavior with the defeated nations was like a father. Even in remote corners of his empire, serfs lived in bliss. His orders were obeyed like a kind father. All the defeated nations knew him as a father and benefactor (Xenophon, 2005: 237). According to Ghirshman, he was a father for Persians, Greeks knew him as their master and legislative, and Jews knew Cyrus as the king from the Lord (Ghirshman, 1989: 143).

Cyrus ritual ceremonies unlike many inscriptions left from Darius and his successors, there is not much left from Cyrus in Persia, except a few short lines in Pasargadae. Besides, there is conflict over Pasargadae's inscription and some of them attributed to periods after Cyrus. So inevitably, we need to refer to the writings of Greek historians, Old Testament and the Babylonian inscriptions.

Xenophon who gives us the most religious information about Cyrus, cites many examples of his words and deeds in different territories. According to his words; When

the army of Cyrus, began their war drive toward Assyrians, in the darkness of night, a dazzling light suddenly appeared over Cyrus's head and made all his army clear in bright light. The light that was reflected from the sky, created a kind of religious excitement in the heart of his forces and all of them were sure of their victory against enemy as one heart and one life (Xenophon, 2005: 104).

Our understanding of this narrative is that Cyrus was known to Iranians as a heavenly and divine figure, it was for a reason that Iranians called him their father and the prince wore his coronation robe as a blessing. All resources talk about his praise and prayer for god/gods, sacrificial offerings, temples/shrines and the share of the Magi by Cyrus. Cyrus stepped into their temple, honored and worshiped their gods, after the capture and entering every city. He commanded his troops, not to destroy religious sites and do not touch their property and treasures. Some consider Cyrus's behavior from his nonchalance or his bias toward Mesopotamian and Jewish gods. While according to Mole "Cyrus was so revered the god of Babylon and the gods of other nations that the inhabitants of any country who were joined the Persian Empire, believed he was their God's chosen leader. Cyrus did not respect the gods of other nations for hypocrisy and demagoguery. But really knew them worthy of respect and believed that every religion, every culture and people need to be respected and everyone who wants his culture and religion to be respected, must respect the religion and culture of others. (Mole et al., 2007: 399).

In fact, Cyrus entered the world of the nations through his own means. As people of Babylon were extremely religious, Cyrus

joined their circle through their means. Especially they were angry and upset at their king, Nabonidus, for being away from Marduk and his closeness to Sin. If there was someone who paid attention to their religious values and put an end to their miseries; could be considered as their chosen prophet from the god. Cyrus was a foresight king who had reached to human perfection values. In his view who believed in the one unique God, different names like Marduk, Lord ... was only referring to the same Ahura. As in the words of Rumi, Enab and Uzum are all the same Angoor (Grape) that is pronounced differently in any language, but the meaning is the same. All of this, is just diversity and changes its form with time and races. Cyrus believed in humanity. In his view, religion in any form should be at the service of the good of humanity. To break the shackles of slavery. Ahura Mazda, Marduk, God, Assyria, Zeus and Apollo are all different names of the creator and the source of everything and everyone, praise it in a different manner. After all, ceremonies and worship are free to be practiced in accordance with the principles of any specific religion.

Renner, has a political conception about the ritual ceremonies of Cyrus. He believes that it's not right, not knowing Cyrus as a religious person or to assume that he believes in Babylonian gods, regarding to the cylinder. In fact, Cyrus realized how to use religion to calm the people who live in the newly freed territories. Thus, he used it very well. So that after the capture of Babylon, returned the Jews to their homeland. Cyrus religious tolerance, doesn't mean that he believed in all the gods, but facilitated his government to this people (Renner, 2012: 5).

### **Eternal Abode**

Cyrus saw a spirit in his dream that told him: O' Cyrus, get prepared. Because soon you will fly into the kingdom of the gods. Cyrus rushed off and interpreted his dream as moving to the eternal abode soon (Xenophon, 2005: 325). But Herodotus and Xenophon's story is different. According to Herodotus, Cyrus died at the hands of Tomyris troops, Queen Masagetha who after killing him on the battlefield, cut off his head and plunged in a pan, full of blood (Herodotus, 2010, vol. 10: 203). However, Herodotus writes four stories out of which the author has chosen the one.

When Alexander of Macedonian returned to Babylon from his last war adventure, he visited the tomb of Cyrus. "Then Alexander became aware that it had been opened and emptied. This was done by Pulymakhus. Thus; Alexander commanded to kill him. Although he was a famed and cherished man among the Macedonians. Such phrases were written on the tomb of Cyrus, O' man, whoever you are and wherever you come from (because I know you will come), I am Cyrus, the founder of the Persian kingdom. A little land covered my body, do not envy me "(Plutarch, 2001: 328).

Why Alexander who was the enemy of the Achaemenid state and its religion, valued the grave of Cyrus so much and killed one of his senior compatriots for opening his grave? Was the sanctity of the grave so much that made even the greatest enemy of his country to strain? It was written on the tomb of Cyrus "O' man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, because I know that you will come". Isn't this, an amazing sentence? Over two thousand and five hundred and fifty years after the death of Cyrus, his tomb is still healthy and this remains a miracle, after this long time, still people from every corner of the world rush

to see his tomb and are eager to take a glimpse. Did Cyrus inspired, like the prophets of Israel, people from everywhere? Why the grave of Cyrus, who was forgotten for centuries by Iranians and their history, turn to be like a Muslim shrine? "Women visiting the shrine touch it three times with their forehead and kiss it three times" (Shapur Shahbazi, 2000: 129).

Cyrus on his deathbed and in his last moments of life said to his surrounding people: "At this moment you do not see my soul. But after the separation from my body, you will see its effects. Human soul will not disappear after leaving the Earth and mortal body. When I die, do not cover my body in gold and silver and the like. Embrace and bury it as soon as possible "(Xenophon, 2005: 271).

Spirit or Faravashi is one of the main pillars of the Zoroastrian religion and other monotheistic religions that won't die; it is then judged and will find its way in heaven or hell. It is a single inner force that is in heaven after death and if praised and vowed, will solve life's problems and fulfill demands.

### **Conclusion**

To understand the religious and ritual character of Cyrus the Great, two documents are needed that complement each other. Archaeological evidences and monuments of the founder of the Achaemenid Empire is in Iran (Pasargadae) and the historical and written documents, produced abroad. The main historical documents that refer directly or indirectly to him are: Greek historian books, Babylon, Old Testament and the Quran. All Greek writers except Ctesian, such as Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch, Strabo, Aristobulus ... spoken about him and his goodness as a server and a model for moral and political

world at that time. He was a man whose goal, after worshipping God, was justice. Some biblical prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Daniel, also referred Cyrus. Based on the writings of these saints, God chose him to be the king for all the kingdoms of the world. In order to overthrow the oppressive governments, to establish justice, rescue the Jews from captivity and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon. In the book of Daniel, Cyrus is mentioned in the form of a ram with two long horns with the title Qarnyym. This title became an excuse for the Jews who wanted to test correctness of Prophet Muhammad's information. Following the question of Jewish monks, Surah al-Kahf was revealed and Verses 82 to 97 of this chapter referred to this subject. According to this verse, God established and strengthened Zolqarnein. He therefore won all his wars in the West, East and North and build a barrier to prevent the entry of invading people of the north. Cyrus war

trips, as well as his architecture, his actions and speech entirely are consistent with Verses of Surah al-Kahf. Thus, some of the prominent figures of Islam and the Qur'anic commentators like Abul Kalam Azad, Allama Tabatabai, and Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi ... know Cyrus to be the Zolqarnein in Quran.

Cyrus Charter and the Declaration of the priests of Babylon, which obtained from the ancient city of Babylon know Cyrus as the chosen one by the Babylonian god, Marduk who has come to revive the religion, support the poor and oppressed and fight against the oppressors. Cyrus respects temples and the God of all peoples under his rule and all were free to worship their gods. Cyrus tolerated different religions because he saw different gods as one creator and one source but with different names. Cyrus was a rain that was falling on all nations and religions alike.

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**Fig.1** Swallowtail Staple. Place: Pasargadae





**Fig. 2** Achaemenid Used the Lead as Mortars for Connecting Rock Fragments. Place: Tomb of Minor Cyrus, Bozpar



**Fig. 3** Stele of Cyrus in Pasargade



**Fig. 4** Assyrian Winged Man



**Fig. 5** Assyrians Dealt with the Vanquished in War. Balawat Bronze Gates

پروپشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی  
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

## همسان‌انگاری کوروش کبیر با ذوالقرنین (تفسیر آیات ۸۲-۹۷ سوره الکهف در قرآن مجید)

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### چکیده

یهودیان مدینه از پیامبر اسلام درباره شخصی به نام ذوالقرنین پرسیدند. متعاقب این پرسش، در سوره کهف آیات ۸۲ تا ۹۷ درباره این شخص که پادشاهی مؤمن به خدا و روز قیامت بود، توضیحات کلی داده شد. طبق این آیات، خداوند با امکاناتی که در اختیار ذوالقرنین قرار داد؛ توانست بر دشمنانش پیروز شود و عدالت را در قلمرو حکومتی خود جاری سازد. در این سوره هیچ اشاره‌ای به مکان، زمان و نام این شخصیت نشده و ذوالقرنین که لقب وی است؛ در اسفار یهود به شکل قارنائیم آمده است. مسائل مجهول فوق باعث شده است تا مفسرین قرآن و اسلام‌شناسان افراد مختلفی را به عنوان ذوالقرنین معرفی کنند. در بین این افراد، نام کوروش، پادشاه هخامنشی و اسکندر مقدونی پادشاه یونان بیش از دیگران به چشم می‌خورد. این پژوهش قصد دارد تا به منظور مشخص ساختن شخصیت ذوالقرنین از روش رهیافت تاریخی استفاده کند. در این روش اسناد مهم و دست اول مذهبی و تاریخی مانند قرآن کریم، تورات، منشور کوروش، نوشته‌های مورخان عصر کلاسیک یونان و... همراه با شواهد باستان‌شناختی در راستای یکدیگر مورد مطالعه و تطبیق قرار گرفتند. براساس نتایج پژوهش‌های صورت گرفته، ذوالقرنین، کوروش کبیر پادشاه هخامنشی بوده است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: ذوالقرنین، سوره کهف، تورات، کوروش کبیر، اسکندر مقدونی.

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