

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

MIRACLES OR MISUNDERSTOOD NATURAL PHENOMENON?

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A miracle is broadly understood to be a phenomenon which occurs outside the laws of nature as we understand them. A phenomenon which cannot be explained other than by Divine intervention or an act by a supernatural entity. However, paranormal phenomena, or observed phenomena which seem to violate 'natural known laws' have prompted certain theologians to consider these events as a physical manifestation of an alternative realm. The allusion is to a world in parallel, which though fully cognizant of its own laws, differs with our known observable physical laws.

However, there are many other definitions of 'miracles' posited which is not the focus of this article here. 'Miracles' for the purposes of this article are understood as those 'events' which appear in the Quran to be narrated as Divine interventions where natural laws seem to have been temporarily suspended.

007.143

"When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord spoke to him, He said: "O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look at You." He (God) said: "By no means can You see Me (direct); But look at the mountain; if it remains in its place, then you shall see Me." When his Lord revealed His glory to the Mountain, He made crumble to dust. And Moses fell down unconscious / in a swoon. When he recovered he said: "Glory be to You! to Thee I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe."

There is no indication in the above verse where Prophet Moses^(pbuh) was asked to meet with his Lord or what particular mountain His Lord asked Prophet Moses^(pbuh) to set his gaze upon. However, the Arabic makes it absolutely clear that a mountain was caused to 'crash / crumble to dust' (Arabic 'dakkan') which caused Prophet Moses^(pbuh) to fall unconscious.

Particularly over the course of the last few decades from certain Muslim corners, there has been a drive to explain these events as natural phenomena. However, it is to be noted that in doing so

much inconsistent usage of the Arabic language and context is offered which arguably extends the usage of 'interpretative licence' to a degree where there is a loss of intellectual honesty and cogency. The translations / selective interpretations of the Arabic text become barely unrecognisable which seem to suggest an almost alternative text to the one in the source Arabic.

QURANIC CONTEXT

What must always be borne at the helm of any Quranic interpretation is the **primary audience to whom the Quran was first delivered**. There are many narratives that remain context specific while others have a much wider appeal and lessons to impart.

The Quran does not appear to narrate the miraculous 'events' in it, with a view to convince a 21st century audience (who were never present to witness them) or the Pagan Arabs of the 7th century in the first instance. Rather primarily, the miraculous 'events' served as a reminder to the listeners from the **people of the previous scriptures** of 7th century Arabia (Arab Jews and Christians) who must have been familiar with these narratives. This was done with a view so that they did not end up being the first to reject the Quran.

002.040-41

"O Children of Israel! call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfil your covenant with Me as I fulfil My Covenant with you, and fear none but Me. **And believe in what I reveal, confirming the revelation which is with you, and be not the first to reject Faith therein, nor sell My Signs for a small price; and fear Me, and Me alone.**

There are many examples in the Quran where the narratives seem to correct an existing 'Biblical' understanding. For example, 1 Kings 11 describes Prophet Solomon^(pbuh) straying into idolatry.

1 Kings 11

⁽¹⁾ King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter— Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ⁽²⁾ They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. ⁽³⁾ He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. ⁽⁴⁾ **As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God,** as the heart of David his father had been. ⁽⁵⁾ He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁽⁶⁾ So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. [1]

There were also many myths and legends associated with Prophet Solomon's^(pbuh) indulgence in sorcery and occult arts.

However, the Quran categorically vindicates Prophet Solomon^(pbuh) of any **wrongdoing**. The narrative in question straddles two verses, so parts will be quoted for brevity. The reader is encouraged to consult the complete narratives.

2:101-102 (part)

"And when there came to them a Messenger from God confirming what (was) with them, a party of those who were given the Book threw the Book of God behind their backs as if they knew nothing. (2:102) **And they followed that which the devils falsely recited against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the devils disbelieved...**"

However, there are many narratives where the Quran seems to clearly **confirm Biblical understanding**, yet retaining the overall authority to act as a criterion to distinguish between right and wrong (5:48)

003:003-4

"He revealed to you the Book in truth confirming that which is **between the hands (Arabic: bayna yadayhi - i.e. authenticating what is present with it of the Torah and Bible)** and He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before this as a guidance for mankind; and He revealed the criterion. Indeed, those who disbelieve in the verses of God, for them is a severe punishment and God Almighty is all able to retribute"

(Please see related article [1] below)

In much the same way, many of the miraculous events narrated by the Quran seem to clearly confirm the understanding of the previous scriptures and the understanding of its followers. To suggest anything else seems wholly unwarranted.

Exodus 7:12

"Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake (**Hebrew: tanniyn**). But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs" [2]

The Hebrew 'tanniyn' means a serpent which is supported by the Arabic text:

020.020

So he threw it, and behold! It was a snake (**Arabic: hayyatun**), active in motion / moving swiftly (**Arabic: Tas'a**)

'Hayyatun' with the verb 'tas'a' clearly means a moving, slithering snake / serpent.

028:31 (part)

"And throw your staff. but when he saw it moving as if it (were) a snake (**Arabic: jannun**) ..."

'tahtazu ka-annaha jannun' (moving as if it were a snake)

It is not the purpose to narrate all the similarities with the Biblical text. However the example above will provide the jist of the argument. One must clearly attempt to ascertain whether the Quran is 'confirming' or 'redefining / correcting' existing Biblical theology with regards miracle narratives. In most (if not all), it seems to confirm them.

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE HIS LAWS

At no place in the Quran is a claim made that God cannot Himself suspend the laws if He so wills. In light of the Quran, to even suggest otherwise is a gross violation of the Almighty's ability to do

whatever He wills. Quite to the contrary, it seems likely that God has narrated the incidents where He has suspended his laws to manifest a certain truth or purpose.

What seems to be at the crux of the misunderstanding is the notion of 'who' cannot change God's laws, plans or decrees. The Quran makes it absolutely clear that no creation of God has the authority to change His laws or His decrees. However to extend this to God Himself is a wholly unwarranted extrapolation.

Furthermore, the assertion on the basis of verses such as 33:63 that God does not alter his practices is a misunderstanding of the Quranic context and text.

033.062

“(Such was) the practice of God (Arabic: Sunnata-Ilahi) among those who lived aforesaid: No change will you find in the practice of God (Arabic: Sunnata-Ilahi)”

The verse clearly addresses those ancients that transgressed and on whom visited the wrath of God. In this way, the Quran makes it absolutely clear that similar punishments can be expected to be meted out on those that commit similar transgressions.

PROPHETIC MIRACLES DENIED

With regards Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) ability to perform miracles of the kind that are associated with his noble predecessors, the Quran remains absolutely clear as to the cessation of any such signs.

(Please see dedicated article below [2] where this subject is covered - Miracles of the Prophet)

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the heart of the assertion that the miracles of the Quran need to be understood as natural phenomenon may be the following:

- The inability of the reader to accept the context of the Quranic narratives.
- The misunderstanding as to whom the natural laws apply (the subjects and not the Creator Himself).
- Not to accept that God can Himself suspend laws or decree those 'suspensions' at particular points in history before He created the Universe and instituted His master plan.
- The inevitable inability to explain an ancient 'event' in a 21st century observable context.
- To see the world in only an observable plane without accepting that there may exist a medium that is not observable, especially when God Himself exists in a plane that is hidden.

A sincere approach to the Quran remains one which fully allows the Quran to speak and one that does not 'read into' or 'impose' into the text something that is not present. Often, as is the case even with traditional interpretations, 'personal theology' is 'read into' the text. One must always remain

vigilant and to curtail any inclination to 'impose theology' on to an ancient text by means of personal desires.

With regards ardent 'desires' generally a stark warning is noted.

025.043

"Have you seen him who takes his desires (passion, impulse, lust) **(Arabic: Hawahu)** for his God **(Arabic: Illahahu)**? Will you then be a protector over him?"

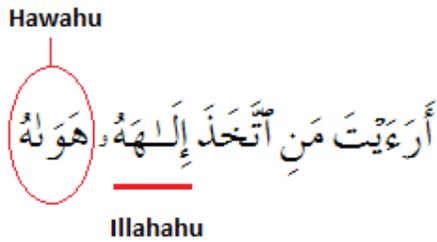


Illustration - Joseph Islam

REFERENCES

[1] Bible - New International Version (NIV)

Highlights marked in bold are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Bible - New International Version (©1984)

Related Articles

- (1) ['Between his Hands' or 'Before It' \(Ma Bayna Yadayhi\)](#)
- (2) [Miracles of the Prophet ^{\(pbuh\)}](#)
- (3) [Scientific Miracles in the Quran](#)

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