

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

UNDERSTANDING THE QURANIC TERM 'ALAMEEN'

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English commentators make use of various terms to describe the Arabic term 'Alameen'. Nations, creatures, mankind are all common epithets. This is undoubtedly one of the problems many translators face whilst attempting to capture the various nuances of a term from one language to another in one word. Some terms also carry slightly different renderings depending on the context they are used in.

The Arabic word '**Alameen**' comes from the root word '**Ayn-Lam-Mim**' which means to know, be aware, knowledge, science, mark or by means of which something can be known.

'Alameen' carries the significance of the meaning 'world', 'creation' 'mankind' or even the entire Universe. It comes from the word plural of 'Alam' and is used in many verses of the Quran.

1:2, 2:47, 2:122, 2:131, 2:251, 3:33, 3:42, 3:96, 3:97, 3:108, 5:20, 5:28, 5:115, 6:45, 6:71, 6:86, 6:90, 6:162, 7:54, 7:61, 7:67, 7:80, 7:104, 7:121, 7:140, 10:10, 10:37, 12:104, 15:70, 21:71, 21:91, 21:107, 25:1, 26:16, 26:23, 26:47, 26:77, 26:98, 26:109, 26:127, 26:145, 26:164, 26:165, 26:180, 26:192, 27:8, 27:44, 28:30, 29:6, 29:10, 29:15, 29:28, 32:2, 37:79, 37:87, 37:182, 38:87, 39:75, 40:64, 40:65, 40:66, 41:9, 43:46, 44:32, 45:16, 45:36, 56:80, 59:16, 68:52, 69:43, 81:27, 81:29, 83:6

عَالَمِينَ

Restricting the word to mean either 'nation', 'mankind', 'creation' or 'Universe' is incorrect as the word may carry any one of these renderings based on context.

العَالَمُونَ signifies the [several] sorts of created beings or things: (س:) [or all the sorts thereof: or the beings of the universe, or of the whole world:] it has this form because it includes mankind: or because it denotes particularly the sorts of created beings consisting of the angels and the jinn and mankind, exclusively of others: I'Ab is related to have explained رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ as meaning the Lord of the jinn, or geni, and of mankind: Kátádeh says, the Lord of all the created beings: but accord. to Az, the correctness of the explanation of I'Ab is shown by the saying in the beginning of ch. xxv. of the Kúr-án that the Prophet was to be a نذِير [or warner] لِلْعَالَمِينَ; and he was not a نذِير to the beasts, nor to the angels, though all of them are the creatures of God;

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

The fact that the word 'Alameen' is not restricted to just all 'creatures' or 'Universe' can be seen from the way 'Alameen' has been used in different parts of the Quran. If we render the word 'Alameen' as 'creatures' only, then the following verses where the word 'Alameen' has been used would read as follows:

- Special favour and preference over all creatures for the Children of Israel 2:122
- Special favour and preference over all creatures for the Children of Israel 2:47
- Special favour and preference over all creatures for the Children of Israel 44:32
- Adam ^(pbuh), Noah ^(pbuh), Family of Abraham ^(pbuh) and the Family of Imran chosen over all creatures 3:33
- First house of worship was a blessing and guidance for all creatures 3:96
- Ismail, Elisha, Jonas and Lot ^(pbuh) were given favour over all creatures 6:86
- Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) guidance to all creatures is no different from the guidance of the prophets of old 6:90
- Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) confirms that the children of Israel are preferred over all creatures 7:140
- Prophets Abraham and Lot ^(pbuh) were taken to a land which was blessed for all creatures 21:71
- Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) was a sign for all creatures 21:91
- The saving of Prophet Noah ^(pbuh) in the ark was a sign to all creatures 29:15

Similarly, rendering 'alameen' as 'Universe' would give us equally unusual renderings. A case in point is used as an example:

- The first house of worship was a blessing and guidance for all 'the Universe' 3:96

Therefore depending on context, the proper meaning of the term 'Alameen' is derived. For example, in verse 1:2, where the term 'Rabbi'l-alameen' is used, the most correct rendering would be 'Lord of the Universe' as opposed to 'Lord of mankind / creatures' as the latter rendering is unnecessarily restrictive given the subject 'God'.

On the other hand, the first house of worship acting as a blessing and guidance for all 'alameen' would be better rendered as 'all nations' or 'mankind' as an earth bound house of worship is unlikely to represent a blessing or guidance for the complete Universe.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 5, Page 2141*

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt 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.

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