

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

UNKNOWN TOWNS AND NAMES - WHY FILL IN THE GAPS?

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Students and readers of the Quran very quickly discover that the Quran very seldom furnishes the reader with names, numbers and details which are often the quintessential backbone of [Islamic secondary sources](#).

Rather, the Quran's focus remains solely to drive the reader to ponder over its narrative and argumentations with a view to extract the wisdom that it intends to impart. The essence or purport of the message remains key and it often exercises silence and subtlety when it deems appropriate. This point is often not appreciated by many who misconstrue this fine balance as an excuse to enter into the tomes of literature that attempts to furnish all manner of details.

Names, who, how and numbers seem irrelevant within the Quran context. The focus remains specific. Concentrate on the narrative text and extract the guidance from it. This sentiment is clearly resonated throughout the scripture.

Let us have a look at some examples:

WISDOM FROM THE STORY OF THE CAVE SLEEPERS

The story of the sleepers in the cave is a Quranic narrative captured between verses 18:9-26 that many Muslims are readily able to identify with. The story focuses on a group of righteous believers who took refuge in a cave after fleeing and slept a great number of years unbeknown to them. When they awoke, it was as if they had lost all concept of time and had slept a mere part of the day where in fact, they had tarried for many centuries.

Out of the many messages that can be derived from this narrative, an immediate inference from the story connects very well with other parts of the Quran. For example, is this narrative posited to aid

one's understanding of death and resurrection where after death, one feels only a small blip in time to resurrection regardless of the centuries or millennia's that have passed in between? This certainly seems to be supported by the following verse.

017:052

"On the day when He will call you forth, then shall you obey Him, giving Him praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little (while)"

There is much else that can be extracted as insight and wisdom from this narrative.

However, we also note the following from the narrative with regards the cave sleepers.

WHAT IS NOT IMPORTANT

018:010 How long they slept. Only God knows.

018:021 What disputes arose amongst the people as to their affair.

018:022 Some say there were 3 sleepers, 4th being the dog, some 5, 6th being the dog, some say 7, 8th being the dog. **Only God knows the numbers.** The reader is then clearly informed "**Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about (the affair of) the Sleepers"**

018:025 How long did they sleep? Some say 300, some 309. **God does not reveal the number.** It is not deemed important. **Only God knows best how long they slept.**

UNKNOWN TOWNS AND UNKNOWN NAMES OF RIGHTEOUS BELIEVERS AND PROPHETS

What was the town and where? Who were the messengers? - All this is **unknown**. The Quran's focus remains on the **message** and guidance to extract and not the details.

016:112 An unknown town in much ease became ungrateful to their Lord. God made them taste a consequence of their wrong doings by hunger and misery.

016:113 An unknown messenger was sent to the town, but was falsely rejected.

002:259 A man passed a town in utter ruin questioned as to how God could possibly bring a dead town back to life. He was made to die for a period of hundred years and then brought back to life. His food was shown not to rot but the bones of his donkey had decayed. No details of the name or identity of the man or the town are given.

036:013-22 An example of 3 messengers is cited as being sent to a town. Everyone denied them except one believer (36:20). The name of the town, its location and the identities of the messengers or the believer are not furnished. However, other details for guidance are.

007:163 A town near a sea is cited that violated the Jewish Sabbath when they were tested with fish that appeared to them on Sabbath day. No specific identity of the town is given.

NAMES

018:065 The name of the servant of God who was to teach Prophet Moses^(pbuh) patience **is not given**. Traditions furnish the name as 'Khidr' not the Quran.

040:028 A beautiful speech is delivered by an unnamed individual from the people of Pharaoh in favour of Prophet Moses.^(pbuh) The name of this person is not important, only the speech remains the focus and the wisdom contained within it.

UNSUSTAINABLE ARGUMENT

Many Muslims make use of the argument that names of towns and places, including those of the companions and wives of the Prophets are not mentioned because the Prophet's contemporaries were familiar with them.

This argument is unsustainable in light of the Quran. Furthermore, the converse is also implied (i.e. names are given as there is unfamiliarity).

There are **many examples** where names and places are known to the contemporaries, yet they are still detailed by the Quran.

With regards names for example:

The Prophet Muhammad^(pbuh) is named 4 times in the Quran and each time to prove that he is the messenger of God (3.144; 33.40; 47.2; 48.29). Is it really logical to argue that this was necessary because they were not familiar with Muhammad^(pbuh) as a person?

The Prophet Muhammad's^(pbuh) adopted son is also named as **Zaid** in **33:37**.

This should be contrasted with the companion in the cave with Prophet Muhammad^(pbuh) who is **not** named in **9:40**. However, the message contained within the verse remains just as powerful and relevant for purposes of extracting guidance.

It becomes evident from the Quran that if an identity of a place or name is important for the message being given, it is expounded. Otherwise, the focus remains on the core and essence of the message not the superfluous details.

AN EXAMPLE FROM A SHORT SURAH OF THE QURAN

Surah Quraish has only 4 short verses.

106.001-4

"For the covenants (of security and safeguard enjoyed) by the Quraish (Arabic: Lilafi Qurayshin) ,
Their covenants (covering) journeys by winter and summer, Let them adore the Lord of this House,
Who provides them with food against hunger, and with security against fear (of danger)"

- Which covenant, where, what journey and what fear? We cannot ascertain any of these details from the 4 short verses. Indeed, historians attempt to furnish many different

accounts of what happened, **often seriously contradictory**. Clearly, an assessment of these sources indicates that even the historians were non the wiser. In the end, no matter what version of the historian's report one accepts, the conclusion is the same. It really does not matter what the details were other than the acknowledgment that this remains a time specific Surah (Chapter) for a certain people of a bygone era. And of course, any other inference that is readily obvious from the 4 verses.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quran remains silent in certain matters not so that the 'perceived gaps in details' can be filled in by hearsay or used as a conduit to vouch for the requirement of [Islamic secondary sources](#) (which are known to have their difficulties). Rather, because there is no benefit in terms of guidance for knowing them. If knowing them was necessary for any purpose (in God's wisdom), then God would have mentioned them. It is clear that God does not run out of words, He only informs us of what we need to know for our guidance.

031:027

"And if every tree that is in the earth (made into) pens and the sea (to supply it with ink), with seven more seas to increase it, **the words of God would not come to an end**; surely God is Mighty, Wise"

A part verse quoted earlier in this article with regards the affairs of the cave sleepers is once again apt for wider wisdom.

018:022 (Part)

"Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, **except on a matter that is clear (Arabic: Illa miraan zahiran)...**"

Despite the clear wisdom from the Quran, it appears that the appetite to acquire unnecessary details from the [Islamic secondary source](#) literature remains insatiable.

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