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## An Exegetical Study of *Tanāsukh* (Reincarnation) from an Islamic Viewpoint

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### Abstract

*Tanāsukh* (reincarnation) has been a controversial subject since time immemorial. The controversial nature of *Tanāsukh* owes majorly to the intelligent nature of the human mind, which constantly pushes humankind to enquire and seek answers to the unending questions of life, the mystery of death and life after death. This paper descriptively examines the exegetical inferences of some selected verses of the Qur'ān that appear to infer reincarnation to opening up a further discourse on the subject of reincarnation from the Islamic viewpoint. The study concludes that the Qur'ān establishes the reality of reincarnation. Hence, scholars of Islamic eschatology must continue to provide logical explanation that best relays the message of Islam and offers adequate interpretation for inferential verses. They also must avoid a dismissal of thought-provoking questions, especially on subjects, which some verses appear to make inferences.

**Keywords:** *Tanāsukh*, Qur'ān; exegetical, inferential, Islamic eschatology

### Introduction

Human existence on earth is a natural design, decreed and managed by Almighty God –Allah. At the end of the time destined for every human being on earth, such human being would have a final cessation of breath and die (Zarūq, 2015). With religionists, death is a passage in the phases of a human voyage. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity: each teaches that death is a passage to eternity in either hellfire or paradise (Meyza-mi-Azad, 2017).

Nevertheless, the reappearance of erstwhile dead people; children bearing marks similar to that which was afflicted on an erstwhile dead person; children speaking of events that happened several years before their birth without anyone ever telling them about those events before and others like it continue to pose questions on the nature of the afterlife. Such reappearance after death falls under the category of *Tanāsukh* (reincarnation).

Siobhan (2015) explains that the word reincarnation comes from the Latin “re” - again and “incarnare” which means, “to make flesh.” In addition, Adefarasin (2006: 54) opines that reincarnation could also mean that “at death, a person passes into another living creature; man, animal or plant.” Uduigwumen (1995: 86) claims that reincarnation implies “the soul of a deceased person taking a new body.” Etuk

(2000) notes that reincarnation is a doctrine, which holds that, after death, the soul of a human being at a point in time, would find another body through transmigration or rebirth and live again as a bodied being.

*Tanāsukh* is a subject that although, appears to question some of the tenets of faith in Islam, offers an opportunity to further develop a critical mindedness and spur Muslims to seeking better understanding of the Qur'ān. This is important because some verses appear to present the idea of reincarnation. Thus, the paper exegetically examines some of those verses with a view to awakening an intellectual discourse of the concept of reincarnation from the viewpoint of Islamic eschatology.

### The Narratives of ‘Uzayr

The Qur'ān briefly mentions Prophet ‘Uzayr while Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) through multiple narrations as recorded by exegetes render accounts of his story. The Qur'ān 2: 259 states:

Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said: “Oh! how shall Allah bring it (ever) to life, after (this) its death?” but Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up (again). He said: “How long didst thou tarry (thus)?” He said: (Perhaps) a day or part of a day.” He said: “Nay, thou hast tarried thus a hundred years; but look at thy food and thy drink; they show no signs of age; and look at thy donkey: And that We may make of thee a sign unto the people, Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh.” When this was shown clearly to him, he said: “I know that Allah hath power over all things.”

Although, scholars of Qur'ānic exegesis express difference of opinions among earliest narrators about whom the verse refers, Ibn-Kathīr, At-Tabarī, Qurtubī and others noted that some have suggested that the Prophet was Armiyah or Hizkīl or Khidr. However, Ibn-Kathīr (2000) and At-Tabarī (2015) reported that many of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) believed that the verse above refers to Prophet ‘Uzayr (AS). He explains that the verse relates the story of Prophet ‘Uzayr (AS) who, having passed by a town whose people had all died and were decomposing exclaimed, asking how Allah would raise them back to life. In response to his exclamatory question, Allah instructed that he died and he remained dead for one hundred (100) years. After a century, he was brought back to life and his donkey restored back to life from its ruin while he, having awakened witnessed the entire process of the “resurrection” of his donkey.

The “resurrection” of ‘Uzayr (AS) after a century of death as stated in the verse quoted above is reminiscent of a return to earthly life after death i.e. reincarnation. Although, many Islamic scholars and exegetes have posited that it is proof of the power of Allah to give and take life as He wills, others like Reza (2012) argue that the verse is a clear proof of reincarnation in the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, resurrection is often used in reference to the Day of Judgment. Hence, the big question is whether ‘Uzayr and his donkey were truly incarnates or not since they both rose from the dead

and lived more days on earth in flesh and bone after one hundred years of death. Were the cases of 'Uzayr and his donkey to be regarded as reincarnation, would all similar cases in the Qur'ān could equally be treated as reincarnation? However close it is, it is a question that many Islamic scholars often avoid.

### The Ascension of Prophets Idrīs and Ilyās (AS)

The Qur'ān mentions twenty-five (25) Prophets of Allah; among them were Idrīs and Ilyās. Allah mentions Prophet Idrīs (AS) twice in the Qur'ān 19: 56-57 and 21: 85. He (Allah) also mentions Prophet Ilyās (AS) in two verses of the Qur'ān 6: 85 and 37: 123. Qur'ān 19: 56-57 states: "Also mention in the Book (the case of) Idrīs: He was a man of truth (and sincerity), (and) a prophet: And We raised him to a lofty station."

The status of Idrīs (AS) as a living or dead person or on who was brought back to life and raised to the heavens is also one of the controversial subjects in Islam. Aṭ-Tabarī (2015) explains that narrators with authentic chains from the companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) such as Ibn Abbās suggest that Prophet Idrīs (AS) was raised to the forth or sixth (4th or 6th) heaven and caused to die there. Thus, he left the world without a trace of his remains. Aṭ-Tabarī (2015) and Ibn-Kathīr (2000) relied on the narrative of Ibn Mujāhid who narrated that Prophet Idrīs (AS) was raised up to the forth (4th) heavens alive like Jesus, son of Maryam (AS). Qurṭubī (2006) and Ibn-'Ashūr (2000) reports hold that Prophet Idrīs died on earth and was raised unto the heavens. However, was he raised in body and spirit or only in spirit? If he was raised in spirit as the reports of Ibn Abbās according to Aṭ-Tabarī (2015) and Ibn-Kathīr (2000), then, the question of his reincarnation does not arise. However, if he was raised in body and spirit after an initial death, then, the question of reincarnation arises.

While the Qur'ān does not suggest that Prophet Ilyās is still alive or dead or reincarnated, scholars have argued about his existence. The argument about his existence stemmed from narratives that infer that Prophet Ilyās was raised into the heavens. Scholars also argue about the actual personality of Prophet Ilyās (AS). Aṭ-Tabarī (2015), Ibn-Kathīr (2000) and Qurṭubī (2006) opine that available reports show that Ilyās was the same person as Idrīs. Ibn-Kathīr and Qurṭubī however added that Isrāiliyyāt (Jewish and Christian) narratives state that he was taken away into the heavens on a ride or horse of fire or light. Ibn-Kathīr (2000) also argues that the narrations suggesting that Ilyās is still alive are either weak or fabricated. Although, Muslim exegetes differ about whether Prophet Ilyās died or not, the most popular opinion is that he died. In addition, no known Muslim exegete suggests that Prophets Idrīs or Ilyās (AS) would reincarnate or already reincarnated. However, if Prophet Idrīs is Ilyās (AS) as suggested by Aṭ-Tabarī (2015), Ibn-Kathīr (2000) and Qurṭubī (2006), then, the question of reincarnation might surface.

### The Narratives of Hizkīl and Qur'ān 2:243

It is worthy of note that there is no mention of Prophet Hizkīl (AS) in the Qur'ān. However, many Qur'ānic exegetes suggest that Qur'ān 2: 243 refers to Prophet Hizkīl (AS) and a group of people from his time.

Have you not considered those (of old) who fled their homes, though they were thousands (in number), for fear of death? Then Allah said to them: 'Die! '(and they died); then He restored them to life. Truly Allah is gracious to people, but most people are not thankful.

The people had fled their homes to be saved from a plague. Allah caused them to die and later restored life in them following the supplication of Hizkīl (AS). The people were said to be in their thousand as suggested by the verse. Qur'ānic exegetes differ on their exact number as no one has a clear picture of the story.

Nevertheless, several Qur'ānic exegetes agreed that the people mentioned in the verse were once dead and decomposing when Prophet Hizkīl (AS) passed by and supplicated for their revival. This verse according to Reza (2012) is another clear proof of reincarnation from the Qur'ān.

### Ibrāhīm (AS) and Restoration of Dead Birds to Life

The Qur'ān also renders an account of restoration of life to birds when Prophet Ibrāhīm (AS) approached a place and found some animals devoured by other powerful animals. Aṭ-Tabarī (2015) explains that Prophet Ibrāhīm (AS) curiously asked how Allah would resurrect such animals again on the Day of Resurrection. Hence, Ibrāhīm (AS) asked Allah to show him how He shall resurrect creatures eaten or shattered into pieces by others.

According to the reports of Aṭ-Tabarī (2015), Ibn-Kathīr (2000), As-Sa'dī (2002) and many other exegetes of the Qur'ān, Allah commanded Prophet Ibrāhīm (AS) to gather four (4) birds, kill the birds, mix their body parts and divide them into four (4) places. The exegetes referenced above note that according to reports, Prophet Ibrāhīm (AS) gathered a peacock, a rooster, a crow, and a dove or a heron after which he did as Allah instructed him i.e. killing the birds, mixing their parts and dividing them into four (4) places, placing each division on mountain-tops.

Following that, Allah instructed Prophet Ibrāhīm (AS) to call out their names. Whichever bird he called, its body parts and blood from wherever they have dropped or placed from all the four (4) places would come together and the bird would return to life. The Qur'ānic account reads:

When Abraham said: "Show me, Lord, how You will raise the dead," He replied: "Have you no faith?" He said "Yes, but just to reassure my heart." Allah said, "Take four birds, draw them to you, and cut their bodies to pieces. Scatter them over the mountain-tops, then call them back. They will come swiftly to you. Know that Allah is Mighty, Wise." (Qur'ān 2: 260).

This miraculous event appears as a proof of regeneration (metempsychosis or re-

incarnation) after an initial ruination. It therefore suggests a form of reincarnation. However, according to the tafsīr works cited above, the event was one of the ways through which Allah taught His Prophets and strengthens their trust in Him. Ibn-‘Āshūr (2000) notes that Qur’ān 2: 260 is a proof of resurrection and added that, it is supportive of resurrection alongside the verse that preceded it i.e. and 2: 259. He explains that both are aimed at proving the power of Allah (to restore life to the dead) to two (2) of His beloved servants. Although, the verses prove the power of Allah to raise all beings back to life as He wills, they also leave the question of reincarnation open for further intellectual discussions.

### **Prophet Mūsā and Restoration of a Dead Person to Life**

Relating the story of Prophet Mūsā in the Qur’ān verses 2: 55-56 and 72, Allah gives an account of two (2) scenarios that depict a return to earthly life for one person and group of persons respectively. Qur’ān 2: 55-56 states:

And remember ye said: "O Moses! We shall never believe in thee until we see Allah manifestly," but ye were dazed with thunder and lightning even as ye looked on. Then *We raised you up after your death*: Ye had the chance to be grateful.

Al-Gharnātī (2002) explains that the verse was revealed in respect of some Israelites who doubted the truthfulness of the message of Prophet Mūsā (AS) and inquired to see Allah before they could be convinced that He is true. At-Tabarī (2015) states that the verses prove that the Israelites often asked excessive and unnecessary questions as a way of disproving the Prophets or denying their messages from God, hence, the sudden death that befell the questioners. Ibn-Kathīr (2000), Al-Qurtubī (2006), Al-Baghawī (1988) and several other exegetes report that the inquirers from the people of Prophet Mūsā (AS) were seventy (70). According to the reports of Ibn-Kathīr (2000), the inquirers died after an extremely loud voice and a powerful storm emerged from the heavens. Referencing Qur’ān 7: 155, Ibn-Kathīr (2000) adds that having seen them die, Prophet Mūsā (AS) began to cry, asking that Allah to resuscitate them as he would have no answer when others ask about them. Thus, Allah brought them back to life one after the other allowing them to witness the process of resurrection similar to the case of ‘Uzayr as presented earlier. Therefore, their restoration to life after an initial death became a miracle for Prophet Mūsā (AS) and proof of the existence of God and His ability to do all things as He wills. This is the understanding of all the exegetes referenced above. Yet, death and restoration to life on earth have been involved. The narrative leaves room for the argument on return to earthly life after death or reincarnation from an Islamic viewpoint.

Similarly, the Qur’ān (2: 67-74) gives an account of a return to earthly life when the followers of Prophet Mūsā (AS) sought to know the cause of the death of a member of their community. Allah says (Q2: 72-73):

Remember ye slew a man and fell into a dispute among yourselves as to the crime: But Allah was to bring forth what ye did hide. So We said: "Strike the

(body) with a piece of the (heifer)." Thus Allah brings the dead to life and shows you His Signs: Perchance ye may understand.

According to exegetes such as Ibn-Kathīr (2000), Ibn-‘Āshūr (2000), Ṭanṭawī (1992), As-Sa’dī (2002), the verse explains that having found a person murdered, the Israelites differed about the murderer and disputed among themselves. Thus, they reported to Prophet Mūsā (AS) to help them investigate the case. The Qur’ān 2: 66-74 renders a detailed account of the incidence.

Many exegetes of the Qur’ān explain that having struck the body of the person with a piece from the heifer, he rose back to life, informed the people about his killer and died again immediately (At-Tabarī, 2015; Al-Qurtubī, 2006; Al-Baghawī, 1988). Although, many scholars view it as a miracle and proof of the power of Allah especially because the person returned to being dead after revealing his killer, yet, the incidence also suggests a form of reincarnation since it is a return to life after an established death.

### **Prophet ‘Isā and Restoration of a Dead Person to Life**

The restoration of an erstwhile dead person restored to life by Prophet ‘Isā - Jesus Christ (AS) as the Qur’ān relates it is one the major miracles of Prophets in Islam that also suggest reincarnation. While recounting the miracles of ‘Isā in the Qur’ān 5: 110, Allah says:

Then will Allah say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit, so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! Thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! Thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee when thou didst show them the clear Signs, and the unbelievers among them said: "This is nothing but evident magic."

Ibn-Kathīr (2000) confirms that Prophet ‘Isā (AS) had recited some of the names of Allah and performed short prayers asking Allah to restore life to a dead person or some dead persons. He added that Allah granted Prophet ‘Isā’s (AS) requests as He did with many other Prophets too. Ibn-Kathīr (2000) then opines that the miracles are proofs of prophethood and power of Allah. This opinion is shared by many classical and modern exegetes such as As-Sa’dī (2002), Al-Baghawī (1988), Ibn-‘Āshūr (2000) and Ṭanṭawī (1992).

While the restoration of dead people to life is adjudged a proof (Mu’jizah) of prophethood, reports of Ibn-AbiDunya (1993) accounts of saints have also proved that restoration of the dead back to life is also one of the Karāmāt(miracles) of selected saints.

Nonetheless, according to Reza (2012), restoration to earthly life after death however uncommon, is a clear proof of reappearance after death i.e. reincarnation. The argument of Reza (2012) is that unless a human soul has met a true death i.e. *Ajal*, the soul might still be restored to the body through the process of reincarnation.

### The Return of 'Isā

One of the most controversial issues of theological discourse among members of the Abrahamic religions is the person of Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS). Similarly, one of the most controversial issues among Islamic scholars is the interpretation of the verses of Qur'ān 4: 157-159 and 3: 55.

While scholars of Islamic exegesis agreed in accordance to the Qur'ān 4: 157-159 that state that the Jews never succeeded in their plot to kill or crucify Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS), they disagreed on whether he was raised to the heavens alive or reincarnated and ascended into the heavens after a short period of death. The interpretation of the meanings of the verses according to classical and modern scholars of Qur'ānic exegesis may be categorised into three (3):

- i. Those who hold that Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was raised in body and spirit without death;
- ii. Those who hold that he was raised to the heavens through the state of sleep like trance;
- iii. Those who hold that he Allah terminated Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) and raised him to the heavens after death.

The most popular of the three (3) opinions is the first, which states that Allah raised Jesus Christ to the heavens alive in body and spirit without any form of death (At-Takbīrī, 2007). Scholars who hold this view have also argued that Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) would return to earthly life towards the end of the world to complete his mission as a Prophet of Allah, live a normal life, and die as every man would. This opinion rests majorly on the interpretation of the verses and numerous narrations from Ḥadīth which allude that the Day of Resurrection will not occur until Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) had arrived, destroyed the cross, stopped the consumption of pigs and killed the antichrist i.e. *Dajjāl* (Al-Hajjāj, 1998).

Nevertheless, exegetes who argued that Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was raised to the heavens only after his earthly death also reject the notion of his possible second return as suggested in the Ḥadīth quoted above. The most significant word in the context of their argument is *Mutawaffīka*, which literally means "I shall terminate you," stated in Qur'ān 4: 55. As-Sa'dī (2002) explains that, Allah indeed raised Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) in body and spirit without death. He quoted Qur'ān 5: 110 as further proof that Allah protected Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) from the plots of the Jews and caused confusion in their minds.

Al-Qurṭubī (2006) explains that scholars have argued that the word *Mutawaffīka* and *Rāfi'uka* follow the rule of *Taqdīm* and *Ta'khīr* in Arabic grammar. This indicates that, although the word *Mutawaffīka* (I shall terminate you) came before *Rāfi'uka* (I

shall raise you), the correct and appropriate way to interpret it would mean that. Allah shall raise Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS), purify him and take his soul before the end of the world (i.e. after he had fulfilled his mission to destroy the cross, kill the pigs and *Dajjāl*). He explains that this rule is common in the Qur'ān as it is with native Arabic speakers.

Al-Baghawī (1988) explains that Muslim exegetes disagree on the interpretation of *mutawaffīka*. He notes that some exegetes like Al-Hasan, Al-Kalbī and Ibn Jurayj translated the word *mutawaffīka* as *qābiduka*, which literally means "to terminate his mission or pause it." They went further to translate the word *Tawqīfaytūnī* in Qur'ān 5: 117 as "after you took me away from them alive":

Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, that is.  
'worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord'; and I was a witness over them whilst  
I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou was the Watcher  
over them, and Thou art a witness to all things.

Al-Baghawī (1988) however added that some exegetes argued that the word *mutawaffīka* implies "I shall make you fall asleep" as it implies in Qur'ān 39: 42 and 6: 60 while *rāfi'uka* means "shall raise you" (i.e. raise him up to the heavens in his entirety – body and soul while he sleeps). He added that some exegetes hold that *mutawaffīka* means "I shall kill you" as the word *wafāt* (death or dying) which is the root word for *mutawaffīka* ordinarily implies death in Arabic language. From amongst those who interpreted the word *mutawaffīka* as "I will kill you or terminate your life," Al-Baghawī (1988) explains that there are two (2) categories:

- i. those who hold the view that Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was killed by Allah for three (3) hours, then resurrected and raised into the heavens alive in body and spirit;
- ii. those who claim that some Christians think that Allah killed Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) for seven (7) hours and then, he returned to life and thereafter, rose to the heavens.

Ibn-'Ashūr (2000) notes that the word *mutawaffīka* should be interpreted in its literal form. That implies that Allah killed Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) without the Jews having a hand in it. Thereafter, He raised him to the heavens and gave him life as He does with all other Prophets (AS). He added that Prophet 'Isā's (Jesus Christ, AS) return to earthly life before the end of the world would not require another death. Therefore, if indeed Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) returns to earthly life as suggested in several *aḥadīth*, at the end of his mission, he shall disappear again into the heavens. Ibn-'Ashūr (2000) added that the second coming of Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) would be a divine miracle that depicts the power of Allah to send His message to mankind however He wills.

Nevertheless, the view that Prophet 'Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) would return to earth and observe Ṣalāt behind the Mahdi is popular among Shī'a and Sunni Muslims alike (Steinbach, 2010).

In a very sharp contrast to the established belief among Sunni and Shī'a Mus-

lms. Ahmadiyyah/Qādiyaniyyah. Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was crucified but did not die on the cross. Ahmadiyyah through an article on their official website (Alislam.org, 2020) explain that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was saved three (3) days after crucifixion and he fled to areas across the Indian subcontinent, which according to the website was originally a part of Israel. They also claim that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) lived to a ripe age of one hundred and twenty (120) and died in Kashmir, present day Indian/Pakistani disputed territory.

In reference to Qur’ān 4: 156-159, Islamic scholars continue to reject both the idea that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was killed on the cross. They also reject the notion that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) lived elsewhere and died as insinuated by the Ahmadiyyah Movement.

Aṭ-Ṭabarī (2015), Ibn-Kathīr (2000), Qurṭubī (2006), Tanṭawī (1992) and several other exegetes relying on several narrations interpreted the last verse as proof that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) would return to earthly life to complete his mission as a Messenger of Allah and would die only after all the Jews and Christians of the time have believed in him and became Muslims.

It is worthy of note that although Islamic scholars and sects have variant views about the verses that speak about Jesus' removal from the earth, it is very uncommon to find a scholar or school of thought in Islam that hold the view that Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) was an incarnate or would reincarnate. While those that argued that he shall return to earthly life also argued that he has not died, others who argued that he has died also argued that he shall not return to earthly life, thereby debunking and rejecting the Ḥadīth and interpretations that suggest a second coming of Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ, AS) as a just ruler.

### ***Aṣḥāb Al-Kahf – Companions of the Cave***

Allah named the Qur’ān chapter 18 after the Companions of the Cave (the Sleepers) whom the chapter confirms that Allah made to sleep for three hundred and nine years (309 years) (Qur’ān 18: 9-27).

Scholars of Qur’ānic exegesis explain that the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* is one of the great miracles in the Qur’ān. Al-Gharnātī (2002) notes that *min āyātinā ‘ajabā* Allah refers to their case as one of His unique and symbolic signs i.e. *Āyātinā ‘ajabā* (Qur’ān 18: 9). He added that it verse implies that there are other greater signs of Allah but the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* is indeed a great sign of Allah’s power and will. This is because the Qur’ān explicitly states that Allah made the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* sleep for over three (3) centuries surviving without food or drink.

Al-Gharnātī (2002) added that the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* were youths who fled the persecution of their pagan king called Daqyānūs and the worship of idols hoping to find a better place to hide and serve Allah without hindrance.

Ath-Tha’alabī (2015) notes that, Daqyānūs Ibn Ḥalābūs was the king of the time. Daqyānūs was a tyrant who had left the religion of Prophet ‘Isā (Jesus Christ)

and embraced idolatry. He added that the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* were some of the few people who still followed the true faith of Jesus Christ (AS) during their time.

Narrating from Muhammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn Yasār, Ath-Tha’alabī (2015) added that every believer (follower of the religion of Jesus – AS) at the time was either killed by crucifixion or mutilation or forced to join in the worship of idols. Hence, the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* fled from the city to find a safe haven to serve Allah.

Narrating from Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbās, Ath-Tha’alabī (2015) rendered the story of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* as youths whose parents were rich but forced to worship idols with Daqyānūs. He added that the youths fled the city and hid themselves in a cave, sending one of them called ‘Tamlīkhā’ to secretly buy their foods and gather vital information. Having lost the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*, Daqyānūs was furious. However, when he found that they have hidden themselves inside the cave, he considered that the cave shall be their grave. That was because every time men of the army of Daqyānūs attempted to enter the cave, the divine barrier placed by Allah threw them away, thus confined them to solitude and assuming that they shall die from hunger and thirst, boycotting them and placing an order that they must be killed if they appear in the city. Ath-Tha’alabī (2015) notes the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* were seven (7) with their dog being their eighth companion. Hence, they stayed inside the cave and worshipped Allah until He created a barrier between them and the city. Thus, Allah protected them from the plots of Daqyānūs and caused them to sleep while many generations passed.

In the cave, Allah protected the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* and nourished them in their sleep for over three hundred years. Hence, their centuries of sleep were similar to being in a state of coma and they never experienced actual death until they were awakened from their long sleep. He added that the exact names of the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* is known and no one is certain about how they exited the cave after they woke as there is no known authentic narration that provides such information. Zamakhshari (2009) explains that Allah caused the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* to sleep deeply and blocked their ears from the noises and waves outside the cave, thus, creating *hijāb* – veil or barrier between them and the outside of the cave. Those are also the words of Al-Jalālayn (2005).

Ath-Tha’alabī (2015), Zamakhshari (2009) and several other exegetes agreed that the incidence of the *ashāb al-kahf* is a proof of resurrection which the unbelievers have always denied. Zamakhshari (2009) added that the attitude of the *ashāb al-kahf* after they were resuscitated from their long sleep and asked how long they have slept is reminiscent of the attitude of people on the Day of Judgement as the Qur’ān 79: 42-46.

Shobaha (2018) notes that the story of the sleepers (*ashāb al-kahf*) beats common human imagination and knowledge. This is because sleeping in a state for long could cause body aches and illness. However, Allah preserved the *ashāb al-kahf* and changed their conditions accordingly, keeping them fresh, hydrated, and peaceful for over three hundred (300) years. Having studied the story from Neuroscience and Hibernation perspective, Shobaha (2018) concluded that the strategic divine position-

ing of the cave and maintenance of the *ashāh al-kahf* are signs of the divine wisdom and power of Allah.

Thus, the Sleepers' three centuries of sleep is similar to the usual sleep of an ordinary person between a night and the next morning. Their case is also unique because the Qur'ān refers to them as a people who were *made to sleep* after their ears were blocked from the outside world *fadarabnā 'alāādhānihim fil kahfis in nā 'adada*—cast (a cover of sleep) over their ears within the cave for a number of years. Qur'ān 18: 11) while it refers to the case of 'Uzayr (AS) as death (*jāumātuhu* – then, He made him to die (Qur'ān 2: 259). That is the view of the most popular exegetes of the Qur'ān.

Thus, although the stories appear similar, they are different. Either way, both stories refer to cases of *death* or *near death experiences* and thus leave room for the possibility of the reincarnation argument. In addition, while the Qur'ān clearly states that 'Uzayr (AS) was *made to die* for a hundred year, it also affirms that the Sleepers *slept* for precisely three hundred and nine years. The post sleep/death experience of the Sleepers and 'Uzayr (AS) respectively suggests that they all felt like they slept for only a few hours according to Qur'ān 18: 19 and 2: 259. This is similar to the experience expected of all humankind on the Day of resurrection according to Qur'ān 10: 45 and 79: 46. Could the cases be classed as reincarnation? This question would continue to linger for as long as the reincarnation discourse and reincarnation-related experiences persist.

## Conclusion

Although, many Islamic scholars reject the concept of reincarnation and consider it heretic, the highlighted verses of the Qur'ān proving a return to earthly life by selected people as ordained by Allah will continue to leave the subject of reincarnation, which literally means a return to life after death open even among Muslims. This paper established that Qur'ān succinctly proves a return to earthly life after an initial death. While that it also established that it is unarguably proof of the power of Almighty Allah Who restores life to whomsoever He wills, whenever and however He wills, but this does not make it reincarnation, which is largely rejected as heresy.

## Recommendations

The study recommends that scholars of Islamic eschatology and exegesis ensure that they do not dismiss thought-provoking questions. Instead, they should provide logical answers in accordance with the Qur'ān and Sunnah to help quench the curiosity of Muslims and others who seek answers to the mysteries of life and nature. In addition, while it is important to dismiss heretic beliefs, it is also important to explain concepts such as reincarnation from an Islamic perspective in ways that protect the sanctity of Islam and sufficiently satisfies the curiosity of the believers.

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