

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE NIGHT JOURNEY - ISRA AND MI'RAJ

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This short article is only intended to point to some facts which should motivate one to start thinking about the veracity of this belief and provide possible food for thought.

WHAT DOES THE QURAN MENTION WITH REGARDS THIS EVENT?

The details in the Quran are short, simple and succinct. Please see appropriate references below.

MAIN REFERENCE

017:001

"Glory be to Him (Arabic: subhana) Who made His servant (Arabic: bi-abdihi) to go on a night (Arabic: laylan) from the Sacred Mosque (Arabic: Masjid-ul-Haram) to the remote mosque (Arabic: Masjid Aqsa) whose precincts We have blessed (Arabic: barakna Hawlahu), so that We may show to him some of Our signs (Arabic: ayatina); surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing"

SUPPORTING REFERENCE

017:060

"And when We said to you: Surely your Lord encompasses men; and We did not make the vision which We showed you but a trial for men and the cursed tree in the Quran as well; and We cause them to fear, but it only increases them in their great transgression"

Some Muslim scholars attempt to use the following verse (as a reference to the vision of Gabriel) as connected to the whole event of ascension. However from a Quran's perspective there is no immediate connection to the narrative of Surah Isra (Chapter 17) albeit this cannot be ruled out.

Therefore, it is included for reference.

053.013-18

"For indeed he saw him at a second descent, Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass: Near it is the Garden of Abode. Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!) (His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest!"

All other beliefs, the winged steed (Buraq), ascension to the heaven, meeting of the Prophets, the constant exchange and negotiations with God with regards prayer and with Prophet Moses's ^(pbuh) input, the institution of the 5 prayers, the cleansing of the Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) heart by first removing it from his bare chest etc are all sourced from [Islamic secondary sources](#).

WHO OR WHAT IS OUR EARLIEST SOURCE WITH REGARDS THE INFORMATION OF MIRAJ THEN?

IBN ISHAQ - A professional storyteller (Died c.767 AD). His original work was not allegedly completed until 130 years after the death of the Prophet and was later transmitted by his students. No original work of Ibn Ishaq has survived nor of (m)any of his original transmitters.

See related article [1] below.

Although snippets of this story may be found in the works of Hadith compilers, please note that their works were not compiled till much later. As an example, it is asserted that Imam's Bukhari's work was not completed until 846CE (Nearly 220 years after the death of the Prophet). This work was then later transmitted by other students of Imam Bukhari. Ibn Ishaq's work was completed over 80 years earlier than Imam Bukhari's compilation of Hadith.

Therefore, Ibn Ishaq was drawing from a pool of traditionalists much earlier than Ahadith compilers such as Imam Bukhari. It is also futile to assert that Imam Bukhari's sources would be 'stronger' than Ibn Ishaq's as Imam Bukhari's sources would only be further removed from the source with greater opportunity for narrative accretions and embellishments. Furthermore, there is no earlier source than Ibn Ishaq's sira that narrates the story in such detail.

It is very significant to study how the narrative was acquired by Ibn Ishaq and the fluid nature of his traditions. The following is an excerpt from an English translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sira as edited and recorded by Ibn Hisham. Ibn Hisham himself did not acquire the information from Ibn Ishaq directly, but rather from another transmitter of Ibn Ishaq, Al-Bakkai.

Some Authorities Given:

THE NIGHT JOURNEY AND THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"Ziyad b. 'Abdullah al-Bakka'i from Muhammad b.Ishaq told me the following"

"The following account reached me from 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud and Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, and Aisha the prophet's wife, and Mu'awiya b.Abu Sufyan, and al-Hasan b. Abul-Hasan al-Basri, and Ibn Shihab al Zuhri and Qatada and other traditionalists, and Umm Hani' d. of Abu Talib. **It is pieced together in the story that follows, each one contributing something of what he was told about what happened ...**" [1]

3rd Person Reference:

THE NIGHT JOURNEY AND THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"I was told that al-Hasan said that the apostle said: 'While I was sleeping ...'"

"I was told that Qatada said that he was told that the apostle said: 'When I came up ...'" [2]

No Names Given

THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"A traditionalist who had got it from one who had heard it from the apostle told me that the latter said: "All the angels who met me when I entered the lowest heaven ..." [3]

Reference to Stories:

THE NIGHT JOURNEY AND THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"In his story al-Hasan said: 'The apostle and Gabriel went their way until ...'" [4]

Sometimes just passing on the information of others without any verification:

THE NIGHT JOURNEY AND THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"According to what I have heard 'Abdullah b. Masud used to say: Buraq, the animal whose every stride ..." [5]

Concealing the identity of the sources:

THE ASCENT TO HEAVEN

"One whom I have no reason to doubt told me on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri: I heard the apostle say, ..." [6]

PARALLELS WITH PROPHET JESUS'S ^(pbuh) TRANSFIGURATION

Those readers who are familiar with Biblical narratives will immediately recognise the parallels with the transfiguration of Prophet Jesus. ^(pbuh)

The Transfiguration of Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) is considered one of the 'greatest miracles' for many Christians.

Some features of the narrative include:

- (1) Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) proceeds to a high mountain (Mount Tabor - Lower Galilee) with Peter, James and John and there Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) suddenly becomes transfigured (changes appearance)
- (2) His face shines like the sun, and his clothes become white as light
- (3) **Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) and Prophet Elijah ^(pbuh) appear** and they converse with Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh)
- (4) A bright cloud overshadows them and a voice from the cloud says 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to him'
- (5) When the Disciples hear this, they fall on their faces and are terrified. Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) then comes to them and makes them rise and says 'Have no fear'
- (6) When the disciples look up, they see no one but Prophet Jesus. ^(pbuh)

(See Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36)

Symbolic readings take Prophets Moses and Elijah ^(pbuh) to represent the Law and the Prophets respectively and in this way Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) too fulfils the 'Law of the Prophets', **the one true religion**.

Many celebrations amongst many denominations of Christianity celebrate this event, with feasts etc.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The article is not intended to provide an exhaustive analysis of any kind but merely to act as a poignant reminder that one must attempt to understand the genesis of the doctrines we (Muslims) have inherited which we completely take as fact today without question.

The earliest source of this information is narrated by a professional storyteller whose own sources are either unknown to us, narrated via 3rd persons and at times lack verification or have concealed identities. The lack of stability with regards the 'Night Journey' narrative is apparent within the earliest extant historical source.

Related Article:

- (1) [Ibn Ishaq's Sira of Prophet Muhammad ^{\(pbuh\)}](#)

REFERENCES

- [1] **GUILLAUME. A, The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah, Oxford University Press, Page 181**
- [2] **Ibid., Page 182**
- [3] **Ibid., Page 185**
- [4] **Ibid., Page 182**
- [5] **Ibid.**
- [6] **Ibid., Page 184**

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