

QUR'AN AND BIBLE SERIES NO. 2

What Indeed Was The Sign of Jonah?

TITLE

THE SIGN OF JONAH

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According to both the Bible and the Qur'an, Jesus Christ performed many mighty miracles during his brief three-year ministry in the land of Israel. Many of the Jews were led to believe in him when they saw such signs and wonders being performed. The Jewish leaders, however, refused to believe in him and although his miracles were widely known they often pressed him hard to perform signs or, indeed, even give them a sign from heaven (Matthew 16.1). On one occasion Jesus answered them by saying that he would give them only one sign:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". *Matthew 12.39-40.*

Jonah was one of the great prophets of Israel and he had been called out by God to preach to an Assyrian city named Nineveh and to proclaim its pending doom. Jonah fled on a ship to Tarshish, however, and when a great storm began to rock the boat he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a large fish. After three days in the fish, however, he was brought up alive and duly went into the city.

Jesus spoke of this three-day internment in the stomach of the fish as the sign of Jonah" and said that it was the only sign he was prepared to give to the unbelieving Jews. During 1976 Ahmed Deedat of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban published a booklet entitled *What was the Sign of Jonah?*, a title which leads the reader to expect a studied exposition of the subject. Instead one finds that Deedat does not answer his own question at all but ventures into an attack on the statement made by Jesus and endeavours to refute it. His arguments are based entirely on two suppositions, namely that if Jonah had been alive throughout his sojourn in the fish, then Jesus must have been alive in the tomb after being taken down from the cross; and if Jesus was crucified on a Friday and rose on the following Sunday morning, then he could not have been three days and three nights in the tomb. We shall consider these two objections in order and will thereafter proceed to analyse the whole subject to see what the Sign of Jonah really was.

1. WAS JESUS ALIVE OR DEAD IN THE TOMB?

It is an accepted fact in Christian commentaries on the book of Jonah in the Bible that Jonah was kept miraculously alive during the time that he was in the stomach of the fish in the sea. At no time throughout his ordeal did he die in the fish and so came ashore as much alive as he was when he was first thrown into the sea.

In his booklet Deedat takes some of the words in the text quoted above out of their context and makes the statement read "As Jonah was ... so shall the Son of man be" and concludes:

If Jonah was alive for three days and three nights, then Jesus also ought to have been alive in the tomb as he himself had foretold! (Deedat, *That was the Sign of Jonah?*, p.6).

Although Jesus had only said that the likeness between him and Jonah would be in the period of time they were each to undergo an internment - Jonah in a fish, Jesus in the heart of the earth - Deedat omits this qualifying reference and claims that Jesus must have been like Jonah in other ways as well, extending the likeness to include the living state of Jonah inside the fish. When Jesus' statement is read as a whole, however, it is quite clear that the likeness is confined to the time factor. As Jonah was *three days and three nights* in the stomach of the fish, so Jesus would be a similar period in the heart of the earth. One cannot stretch this further, as Deedat does, to say that as Jonah was *alive in the fish*, so Jesus would be alive in the tomb. Jesus did not say this and such an interpretation does not arise from his saying but is read into it. Furthermore, in speaking of his coming crucifixion, Jesus on another occasion used a similar saying which proves the point quite adequately:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up". *John 3.14*

Here the likeness is clearly in being "lifted up". As Moses *Lifted up* the serpent, so would the Son of man be *Lifted up*, the one for the healing of the Jews, the other for the healing of the nations. In this case the brass serpent Moses made never was alive and if Deedat's logic is applied to this verse we must presume that it means that Jesus must have been dead before he was lifted up, dead on the cross, and dead when taken down from it. Not only is this illogical, the contradiction between the states of Jonah and the brass serpent (the one was always alive through his ordeal, the other was always dead when used as a symbol on a pole) shows that Jesus was only drawing a likeness between himself and Jonah and the brass serpent respectively in the matters he expressly mentions - the *three days and three nights* and the *lifting up* on a pole. It does not matter whether Jonah was alive or not - this has nothing to do with the comparison Jesus was making.

By omitting the qualifying reference to the time period in Jonah's case, Deedat makes the saying of Jesus read "As Jonah was ... so shall the Son of man be" and it is from this unrestricted likeness that he seeks to extend the comparison to the state of the prophet in the fish. But if we follow the same method with the other verse quoted, we come to the exact opposite conclusion. In this case the statement would read: "As the serpent ... so shall the Son of man be" and the state of the serpent was always a dead one. This shows quite plainly that in each case Jesus was not intending to extend the likeness between himself and the prophet or object he mentions to the question of life or death but solely to the very comparisons he expressly sets forth. So we see that Deedat's first objection falls entirely to **the ground**. A contradictory conclusion automatically results from his line of reasoning and no objection or argument which negates itself can ever be considered with any degree of seriousness.

2. THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS.

It is universally agreed among Christians, with a few exceptions, that Jesus was crucified on a Friday and that he rose from the dead on the Sunday immediately following. Deedat accordingly argues that there was only one day on which Jesus was in the tomb, namely Saturday, and that this period covered only two nights, namely Friday night and Saturday night. He thus endeavours to disprove the Sign of Jonah in respect of the time factor that Jesus mentions as well and so concludes:

Secondly, we also discover that he **failed to fulfil** the time factor as well. The greatest mathematician in Christendom will fail to obtain the desired result - three days and three nights. (Deedat, *What was the Sign of Jonah*, p. 10).

Unfortunately Deedat here overlooks the fact that there was a big difference between Hebrew speech in the first-century and English speech in the twentieth-century. We have found him inclined to this error again and again when he sets out to analyse Biblical subjects. He fails to make allowance for the fact that in those times, nearly two thousand years ago, the Jews counted any part of a day

as a whole day when computing any consecutive periods of time. As Jesus was laid in the tomb on the Friday afternoon, was there throughout the Saturday, and only rose sometime before dawn on the Sunday (the Sunday having officially started at sunset on the Saturday according to the Jewish calendar), there can be no doubt that he was in the tomb for a period of three days.

Deedat's ignorance of the Jewish method of computing periods of days and nights and their contemporary colloquialisms leads him to make a serious mistake about Jesus' statement and he proceeds to make much the same mistake about his prophecy that he would be three nights in the tomb as well. The expression *three days and three nights* is the sort of expression that we never, speaking English in the twentieth-century, use today. We must obviously therefore seek its meaning according to its use as a Hebrew colloquialism in the first-century and are very likely to err if we judge or interpret it according to the language structure or figures of speech in a very different language in a much later age.

We never, speaking English in the twentieth century, speak in terms of days and nights. If anyone decides to go away for, let us say, about two weeks, he will say he is going for a fortnight, or for two weeks, or for fourteen days. I have never yet met anyone speaking the English language say he will be away fourteen days and fourteen nights. This was a figure of speech in the Hebrew of old. Therefore right from the start one must exercise caution for, if we do not use such figures of speech, we cannot presume that they had, in those times, the meanings that we would naturally assign to them today. We must seek out the meaning of the prophecy Jesus made in the context of the times in which it was given.

Furthermore we must also note that the figure of speech, as used in Hebrew, always had the same number of days and nights. Moses fasted *forty days and forty nights* (Exodus 24.18). Jonah was in the whale *three days and three nights* (Jonah 1.17). Job's friends sat with him *seven days and seven nights* (Job 2.13). We can see that no Jew would have spoken of "seven days and six nights" or "three days and two nights", even if this was the period he was describing. The colloquialism always spoke of an equal number of days and nights and, if a Jew wished to speak of a period of three days which covered only two nights, he would have to speak of *three days and three nights*. A fine example of this is found in the Book of Esther where the queen said that no one was to eat or drink for *three days, night or day* (Esther 4.16), but on the *third day*, when only two nights had passed, she went into the king's chamber and the fast was ended.

So we see quite plainly that "three days and three nights", in Jewish terminology, did not necessarily imply a full period of three actual days and three actual nights but was simply a colloquialism used to cover any part of the first and third days. The important thing to note is that an equal number of days and nights were always spoken of, even if the actual nights were one less than the days referred to. As we do not use such figures of speech today we cannot pass hasty judgments on their meaning, nor can we force them to yield the natural interpretations that we would place on them.

There is conclusive proof in the Bible that when Jesus told the Jews he would be three days and three nights in the earth, they took this to mean that the fulfillment of the prophecy could be expected after only two nights. On the day after his crucifixion, that is, after only one night, they went to Pilate and said:

Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again'. Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day. *Matthew 27.63-64*

We would understand the expression "after three days" to mean anytime on the *fourth* day but, according to the colloquialisms the Jews knew this referred to the *third* day and were not concerned to keep the tomb secured through three full nights but only until the third day after just *two* nights. Clearly, therefore, the expressions "three days and three nights" and "after three days" did not mean a full period of seventy-two hours as we would understand them, but any period of time covering a period of up to three days.

If someone told anyone of us on a Friday afternoon in these days that he would return to us after three days we would probably not expect him back before the following Tuesday at the earliest. The Jews, however, anxious to prevent any fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (whether actual or contrived), were only concerned to have the tomb secured *until the third day*, that is, the Sunday, because they knew that the expressions "after three days" and "three days and three nights" were not to be taken literally but according to the figures of speech that they used in their times.

The important question is, not how we read such colloquialisms which have no place in our figures of speech today, but how the Jews read them according to the terminology of their times. It is very significant to note that when the disciples boldly claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead on the third day, that is, on the Sunday after only two nights had passed (e.g. Acts 10.40), no one ever attempted to counter this testimony as Deedat does by claiming that three nights would have to pass before the prophecy could be deemed to be fulfilled. The Jews of those times knew their language well and it is only because Deedat is ignorant of their manners of speech that he presumptuously attacks the prophecy Jesus made, simply because he was not in the tomb for an actual three-day and three-night period of seventy-two hours. (This means that Jonah's sojourn in the fish also only covered a partial period of three days and was not necessarily three actual days and nights either).

Having therefore adequately disposed of Deedat's weak arguments against the sign Jesus offered to the Jews we can now proceed to find out exactly what the Sign of Jonah really was.

3. JONAH A SIGN TO THE MEN OF NINEVEH.

Two momentous events occurred when God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn the people of that city that God was about to destroy it for its wickedness. The first we have already briefly considered, namely the casting of the prophet into the sea and his sojourn in the stomach of the fish over a period of three days. It will be useful at this stage, however, to record the story as it is found in the Qur'an and to compare it with the story as it appears in the Bible to see to what extent the stories coincide. The narrative in the Qur'an reads:

And lo! Jonah verily was of those sent (to warn). When he fled unto the laden ship, and then drew lots and was of those rejected; and the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy; And had he not been one of those who glorify (Allah), He would have tarried in its belly till the day when they are raised. Then We cast him on a desert shore while he was sick; and We caused a tree of gourd to grow above him; and We sent him to a hundred thousand (folk) or more. And they believed, therefore We gave them comfort for a while. *Surah 37.139-148.*

The story is rather disjointed in this passage as there is no sequence of events showing how each incident leads on to the next one. It is in the Book of Jonah in the Bible, however, that one finds the whole narrative properly knit together. Jonah agreed to join in the throwing of lots with the other soldiers on the boat to discover who was the cause of the storm which threatened to drown them all. The lot fell on him and so he was thrown into the sea where he was duly swallowed up by a large fish. After three days the fish coughed him up on dry land and he duly went to Nineveh, proclaiming that the city would be overthrown in forty days.

The other great event was the total repentance of the whole city, from its king to all its slaves, when they heard the ominous warning. Jonah, surprisingly, was angry **when he saw the people turn** from their sins for he knew that God was merciful and would probably spare the city. As a patriotic Hebrew he had hoped for its overthrow for it was the main city of Assyria and a constant threat to the people of Israel. In the heat of the day he went up a mound hoping to see its demise, and God caused a gourd (a large plant) to grow up and give him shelter. The next day, however, God appointed a worm to consume its stem and thus cause it to wither. Jonah was very upset about this but God said to him:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" *Jonah 4.10-11*

The second great event in this story, that is, the repentance of the whole city of Nineveh, was all the more remarkable when one considers that the Assyrians neither knew nor feared God and had no obvious reason why they should heed the word and warning which Jonah brought. There was no sign that the city would be destroyed in forty days as Jonah warned as life was just going on normally

from day to day without any suggestion from the weather or the elements that any danger was near.

No thunderclouds formed over the city as had happened at the time of Noah when the great flood burst on the earth. Nineveh was a mighty city and was in no way under any military threat. All that the city heard was the solitary voice of a Jewish prophet who came proclaiming: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3.4).

We often see cartoons of bearded old men carrying placards "the world ends tonight" and such men are always a source of amusement when they appear on the streets with such messages. Indeed the Ninevites might have considered that Jonah was just one of these religious freaks and while being amused at his apparent earnestness, they might have become somewhat indignant at the content of his warning.

When the Apostle Paul went to the city of Athens he was met with such a reception. In response to his preaching some said "What would this babbling say?" (Acts 17.18). The people of Nineveh listening to the Hebrew prophet Jonah might well have mused as the Athenians did about the Apostle Paul, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" (Acts 17.18). We discover, however, that:

The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. *Jonah 3.5*

From the throne of the king down to the least of the common folk the hundreds of thousands of Ninevites took Jonah in all seriousness, repented in great earnest, and desperately sought to remove the imminent judgment from their city. Jonah in no way endeavoured to persuade them of the truth of his short, simple warning - he just proclaimed it as a matter of fact. He also gave them no assurance that God would spare the city if they repented. It was, on the contrary, his wish and expectation that the city would be destroyed in terms of God's warning whether the Ninevites took him seriously or not.

Why then did the whole city repent and do so in the hope that God would not cause them to perish? (Jonah 3.9). Jewish historians were fascinated by this story and concluded that the only possible explanation was that the Ninevites knew that Jonah had been swallowed up by a fish as God's judgment on his disobedience, and also knew that while he would normally die in such circumstances, God in mercy kept him alive and delivered him from the stomach of the fish on the third day. This alone could explain the seriousness with which they listened to Jonah and their hope of mercy if they repented.

The Jewish historians concluded that the Ninevites reasoned that if God treats his beloved prophets so severely when they disobey him, what could they expect when the city was in the gall of bitterness against him and in the bond of iniquity and sin?

The reasoning of the Jews was correct. Jesus confirmed that Nineveh's repentance came about as a result of their full knowledge of Jonah's ordeal of the preceding days. He made this quite plain when he said:

"Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh". *Luke 11.30*

In saying this Jesus put the seal of authenticity on the story of Jonah's ordeal and Nineveh's repentance and confirmed that it was historically true. At the same time he also gave credence to the theory that the people of Nineveh had heard of Jonah's ordeal and remarkable deliverance and as a result of this took his message in all seriousness, hoping for a similar deliverance in turning from their wickedness in repentance before God. By saying that Jonah had become a sign to the men of Nineveh he made it plain that the city knew of the recent history of God's dealing with the rebellious Jewish prophet. This explained the earnestness with which the Ninevites repented before God.

It was not Jesus' intention merely to confirm Jewish speculations, however. He wished to show that what had happened at the time of Jonah and its sequel was applicable to the people of Israel in his own generation and that a similar sign was about to be given which would likewise lead to the redemption of those who received it and the destruction of all those who did not.

4 NO SIGN BUT THE SIGN OF JONAH.

According to both the Qur'an and the Bible, Jesus performed many signs and wonders among the people of Israel (Surah 5.110, Acts 2.22). Even though they could not deny these works (John 11.47), they nevertheless refused to believe in him and that right to the very end of his course. As he was completing his ministry we read of their response to all that he had done among them:

Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him.
John 12.37

Time and again we read that the Jews came to him seeking signs (Matthew 12.38) and on one occasion they expressly asked him to actually show them a sign from heaven itself (Matthew 16.1). On other occasions they taxed him with questions like these:

"What sign have you to show us for doing this?" *John 2.18*

"What sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you?" *John 6.30*

While the Greeks of that age were primarily philosophers, the Jews wanted every claim proved by the ability to do and perform signs. As the Apostle Paul rightly said in one of his letters:

For the Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom. *1 Corinthians 1.22*

The Jews knew full well that Jesus was, in his own way, claiming to be the Messiah. If so, they reasoned, he must do signs to prove his claim. Although he had already done many great signs, they still were not satisfied. They had seen him feed up to five thousand men with only five barley loaves and two fishes (Luke 9.10-17) but they reasoned that Moses had done similar miracles (John 6.31). In what way could he prove that he really was the chosen Messiah, they reasoned? What sign could he do to show them that he was greater than Moses?

In those days people were not readily persuaded by great signs. When Moses turned his rod into a serpent, Pharaoh's magicians did likewise. They also emulated his feat of turning water into blood and bringing swarms of frogs from the Nile. It was only when Moses brought out thousands of gnats from the dust that the magicians conceded: "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8.19), for they were finally unable to do likewise.

So also the Jews were only prepared to consider Jesus' claims when he could outdo the signs of the prophets of old. They saw him feed five thousand men and heal lepers and men born blind; raise up paralytics, cast out demons; and ultimately raise a man from the dead even though the man had already been dead for four days. They conceded these miracles.

All this did not satisfy them, however, for other prophets had performed similar miracles. What sign did Jesus have for them which outweighed them all? Surely if he was the Messiah he could do greater things than these? Why, Moses gave their forefathers bread from heaven to eat. And it was predicted of the Messiah that he would do similar signs (Deuteronomy 18.18, 34.10-11), they therefore came to Jesus eventually and asked him to show them a sign from heaven" (Matthew 16.1). Jesus absorbed their earnest quests for signs and said to them:

"This generation is an evil generation: it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation". *Luke 11.29-30*

They wanted a sign that would prove beyond all shadow of doubt that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Here Jesus gave them a clear answer and set before them just one sign by which they could be assured of his claims, namely, the Sign of Jonah. Although we have mentioned it already, it will be useful at this point to refer to it once again:

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". *Matthew 12.40*

Here Jesus quite plainly outlined the proof of his claims. Jonah had been three days and three nights in the stomach of the fish. Not only was this a sign to Nineveh, it also prefigured the sign Jesus was to be for his people and not for them alone but for all people in all ages. He would be in the "heart of the earth for

a similar period. What did this mean? Would he be dead? Why would he be there three days? Assuredly the Jews must have been very perplexed about this claim but every time they asked Jesus for a sign, he promised them no other sign but the Sign of Jonah. During one incident with them he plainly told them its meaning.

5. "DESTROY THIS TEMPLE AND IN THREE DAYS ..."

When Jesus saw that the Jews were transforming the Temple (the great place of worship where God's glory was in the centre of Jerusalem, known in Islam as the *baitul-Mugaddas*) from a house of prayer into a place of trade, he drove out the moneychangers and those who sold sheep, oxen and pigeons. The Jews then said to him:

"What sign have you to show us for doing this?" *John 2.18*

In other words, by what authority do you, a man, enter the Temple of the living God and act as if you are the Lord of it? Once again they requested a sign and again the same sign was promised by Jesus:

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". *John 2.19*

Once again Jesus gave them the Sign of Jonah. Again there came the period of three days but now something more is added. He challenges the Jews to *destroy* the temple and whereas he earlier spoke of being himself in the heart of the earth for three days, now he speaks of the temple of God being destroyed for three days and thereafter being restored. So the Jews said to him:

"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days?" *John 2.20*

Now that was a silly question. They asked for a sign of supernatural source to validate the action Jesus had taken. If he had said "Destroy this temple and in forty-six years I will build another", what sort of sign would that be? But he said he would do it in only three days. That would assuredly be a sign for them to see and behold, proving that he was indeed all that he claimed to be.

This was one of the most momentous statements Jesus ever made and if ever there was a remark of his that made an indelible impression on the minds of the Jews, it was this one.

When Jesus was brought to trial years later, the two witnesses brought to testify against him both mentioned this remarkable claim. One said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days'" (Matthew 26.61). Another said, 'We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands'" (Mark 14.58). Both of these men twisted his statement primarily through a total misunderstanding and inability to perceive the meaning of it. But that it was a claim of great import they realised!

Indeed even when Jesus was nailed to the cross some of the Jewish priests mocked him, saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! (Matthew 27.40). Even some time after Jesus had ascended to heaven the Jews were still talking about his challenge and imagined that it was Christian belief that Jesus would yet come to destroy their holy place (Acts 6.14).

The tremendous attention paid by the Jews to this statement, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up shows how important it was. Even as these Jews mocked him, however, they were unaware that they themselves were doing just that -they were destroying it by putting Jesus on the cross; and on the third day thereafter they would know that he had risen again. When Jesus said "Destroy this temple" he was not referring to the great building in the city but to his own body. In his Gospel John comments on the reply of the Jews about the number of years it took to build the Temple, "But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2.21).

Jesus said that it was he, the Son of man, who was to be in the heart of the earth for three days and when he addressed the Jews he spoke obviously not of the Temple in Jerusalem which he had just purified but of himself. But why did he refer to himself as the temple? It requires only a little perspective on his ministry and identity to obtain the answer. The Jews wanted him to prove that he was the Messiah and to do this they expected him to show by signs that he was greater than all the other prophets. In his answer Jesus set out to show them that he was no ordinary prophet. The Temple in Jerusalem contained only the presence of a manifestation of the glory of God, but of Jesus we are told:

In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell. He is the image of the invisible God. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily. *Colossians 1. 19, 15; 2.9*

What Jesus was saying then was this: Destroy me, in whom the whole fulness of God dwells bodily, put me to death, and by raising myself from the dead three days later I will give you all the proof you will ever require that I am the Lord of this Temple, the house of God.

6. THE ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN OF JONAH.

Now it becomes clear why Jesus gave the Jews this one sign, the Sign of the prophet Jonah. His death, burial and resurrection from the dead would surely prove to them that he was the Messiah.

We have seen already that the Jews sought a sign from heaven, a greater feat than that performed by any other prophet in history to prove his claims, and as one looks at the miracles of the former prophets one sees all the more the significance of the Sign of Jonah. As mentioned earlier, prior to the trial and arrest of Jesus his greatest sign was to raise Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for four days. But this did not persuade the Jews (John 12.9-11). Such things had been done during the time of the prophet Elisha.

But what greater feat can a man perform than to raise a dead man to life again? Only one possibly greater sign can be done. If that man after dying is able to raise *himself* from the dead and live again, this will surely be a greater sign and this sign was performed by no prophet before Jesus.

Living prophets had raised the dead but the sign Jesus was promising them was that the Messiah would raise himself from the dead. This is the Sign of Jonah. The Jews had stood at the foot of the cross mocking Jesus, You who would destroy the Temple of God in three days , but they did not know that, after expiring a few hours later, Jesus would raise himself from the dead on the third day in overwhelming proof that he was indeed the Messiah and the ultimate temple of God, the one in whom the living God of all creation fully dwelt. As Jonah had come back from the stomach of a fish in the very depths of the sea to yet live on the earth, so Jesus was to die, be buried, only to raise himself to life on the third day. On one occasion Jesus made this quite plain to the Jews, saying:

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father". *John 10. 17-18*

Not only did Jesus make it plain that he would raise himself from the dead on the third day but he also often showed that he was greater than all the prophets who had gone before him. When the Jews asked him "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (John 8.53), Jesus made it plain that he was, saying that Abraham had looked forward to his day (John 8.56) and added, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8.58). In the same way a Samaritan woman said to him: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (John 4.12) to which Jesus replied that, whereas Jacob had left a well in the land of Samaria from which people could drink, only to thirst again, he could put within people a well of living water from which no one would ever thirst (John 4.14).

He showed that he was greater than Moses, for Moses had written of him (John 5.46). He was greater than David, for David, he said, "inspired by the Spirit, calls the Messiah *lord*" (Matthew 22.43). He openly stated that he was greater than the prophets Solomon and Jonah (Luke 11.31, 32) and that he was even greater than the very Temple of God (Matthew 12.6), for the Temple contained only a manifestation of God's presence but in him the whole fulness of God dwelt bodily.

No man had ever had greater wisdom than Solomon but Jesus is the very wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1.24). Jonah became a source of reprieve for the people of Nineveh but Jesus is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5.9).

Although there had been many prophets, there was to be only one Messiah. And whereas the prophets had performed many signs, the Messiah reserved to himself the greatest sign of all. As Jonah's ordeal in the stomach of the fish in many ways foreshadowed this sign, namely the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Jesus therefore set forth this sign alone as a proof that he was indeed the Messiah.

This leads us to consider in closing another statement made by Deedat in another booklet he once wrote, to the effect that there is *no clearer statement of Jesus throughout the Gospels* about his pending crucifixion than the Sign of Jonah (Deedat, *Was Christ Crucified?*, p.33). He made this remark during an attempt, similar to the one we have already considered in his booklet *What was the Sign of Jonah?*, to prove that Jesus came down alive from the cross, recuperated in his tomb, and somehow or other recovered his health.

Now if Jesus was taken down from the cross alive and survived only because he was so close to death that the Roman soldiers presumed he was dead, and managed through clandestine meetings with his disciples and various disguises to gradually recover (as Deedat claims), we may indeed ask, *what sort of sign is this?* If we are to take Deedat's contentions seriously, we must conclude that Jesus escaped death entirely by chance and recovered according to a natural process. This would not have been a miracle at all, let alone a sign greater than all the signs done by the prophets before him. Deedat's analysis of the Sign of Jonah thus leaves us without a sign at all!

On the other hand, if we take the narratives of the crucifixion in the Bible at face value and accept that Jesus died on the cross, only to raise himself from the dead on the third day, then we have indeed a sure sign and manifest proof that all his claims were true. Other living prophets had raised dead men to life but *Jesus alone raised himself from the dead*, and that to eternal life, for he ascended to heaven and has been there for nearly twenty centuries. It is in this alone that we find the true meaning of the Sign of Jonah and are able to perceive why Jesus singled it out as the only sign he was prepared to give to the Jews.

We see, therefore, that Deedat's final argument in favour of the theory that Jesus survived the cross is actually the very strongest evidence one can find against it. Although his booklets are thus easy to refute, the matter cannot be left here for the sign Jesus gave has implications for all men in all ages. As Jonah's sojourn in the stomach of a fish in the depths of the sea for three days authenticated his word to Nineveh, so the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ put the stamp of authenticity on his mission of salvation to all men in all ages. If you miss the import of this sign, Jesus gives you no other. No further proof that he is the Saviour of all men need be given to those who refuse to believe in him as their Lord and Saviour.

Nevertheless we have a wonderful assurance for those who perceive the meaning of this sign and who are prepared to believe in Jesus and follow him all their days as Saviour and Lord: just as no soul in repenting Nineveh perished, so

neither will yours if you will commit your whole life to Jesus who died for you and rose from the dead on the third day that you too might live with him forever in the kingdom of heaven to be revealed when he returns to earth.

During 1978 Deedat published another booklet entitled *Resurrection or Resuscitation?* which, like his booklet on the Sign of Jonah, attempts to prove that Jesus came down alive from the cross - a theory with no foundation in either the Bible or the Qur'an, one disowned by Christians and Muslims, and held to only by the Ahmadlyya sect which has been denounced as a non-Muslim cult in Pakistan.

Early on in this booklet, as in others he has written, Deedat promotes arguments which are based on nothing but his own ignorance of the Bible and to some extent of the English language. He speaks of a conversation he once had with a reverend" and boldly says of Luke 3.23:

I explained that in the most ancient" manuscripts of Luke, the words '(as was supposed)' are not there. (Deedat, *Resurrection or Resuscitation?*, p.7)

Very significantly he gives no authority for this statement and we are amazed at it for it is absolutely false. This man seems to think he can say what he likes about the Bible, no matter how factually absurd his statements are. Every manuscript of Luke's Gospel, including all the most ancient manuscripts, begins the genealogy of Jesus by saying that he was the son, *as was supposed*, of Joseph (meaning that he was not his actual son, having been born of his mother Mary alone). There is just simply no evidence for Deedat's fatuous claim. So much for his self-acclaimed knowledge of the Bible! We are sure discerning Muslims will have seen by now that this man is no true scholar of the Christian Scriptures.

He appears to believe that the words quoted are missing from the oldest texts because they appear in brackets in some English translations. But any scholar will know that the use of brackets is a common form in the English language by which passing comments and personal notations are characterized. There are no such brackets in the Greek text but as the words in Luke 3.23 are clearly a comment, some translations place them in brackets. In the Revised Standard Version this form appears often where brackets are used for passages where no such brackets are used in the original Greek simply because, like the Arabic of the Qur'an, such forms are not used in Greek to identify comments or personal remarks. (The same goes for inverted commas to identify a quotation. Inverted commas were used in neither classical Greek nor in classical Arabic). Examples are Acts 1.18-19, Romans 3.5, Galatians 1.20 and 2 Peter 2.8. Deedat's argument is based entirely on false premises and erroneous suppositions.

His attempts to prove that Luke 24.36-43 shows that Jesus must have come down alive from the cross are equally unfounded. He bases his whole argument on a complete misconception of Biblical teaching about the resurrection. It is

widely accepted that every man has a body and a spirit. At death the body dies and the spirit leaves the body. The Bible teaches

plainly that the body and spirit will again be united at the resurrection but that the bodies of true believers will be changed and that they will be raised in spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15.51-53). This means that the spirit will be clothed with a body that will reveal the true character of the spirit and will be eternal. Deedat, however, completely misunderstands this and erroneously takes "spiritualized" to mean that the body itself will not be raised from the dead and transformed but that the spirit alone will be "raised".

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after coming out of the tomb they were startled and frightened and supposed that they saw a spirit" (Luke 24.37). Deedat argues that this means that they had believed that Jesus was dead and so thought it must be his ghost, but the Bible makes it plain why they were so amazed. The doors had been locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews and yet Jesus suddenly stood among them (John 20.19). Having been raised from the dead in a *spiritualised body* he could appear and disappear at will and was no longer bound by physical limitations (cf. also Luke 24.31, John 20.26).

Nevertheless, because Jesus called on the disciples to handle him and because he ate a piece of fish before them (Luke 24.39-43), Deedat suggests that this shows that Jesus had not risen from the dead. He bases this argument on the assumption that a spiritualized body cannot be material in any way but must only be a spirit. He argues that Jesus was trying to show his disciples that he had therefore not risen from the dead and says:

He is telling them in the clearest language humanly possible that he is not what they were thinking. They were thinking that he was a spirit, a resurrected body, one having been brought back from the dead. He is most emphatic that he is not! (Deedat, *Resurrection or Resuscitation?*, p. 11)

So, according to Deedat, Jesus is stating in the "clearest language humanly possible" that he had not been raised from the dead. Yet, in the very next thing that Jesus said to his disciples, we find him stating quite plainly that this was in fact *precisely* what had happened - that he had indeed been raised from the dead. He said to them:

"Thus it is written that the Ch2ist should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations". *Luke 24.46-47*.

In the "clearest language humanly possible", therefore, we find that Jesus told his disciples immediately after eating before them that he had just fulfilled the prophecies of the former prophets that he should *rise from the dead on the third day*. *80* once again we find Deedat's argument falling to the ground and that

purely because he is not a genuine scholar of the Bible and has no reasonable grasp of Biblical theology.

The Bible plainly teaches that it is the body itself - a material substance - that will be raised at the resurrection (see Jesus own teaching in John 5.28-29), but that it will be transformed. Today two men can be ploughing the same field. If they are identical twins it will be almost impossible to tell them apart. Yet the one may be righteous and the other wicked (Matthew 24.40). The difference is not outwardly apparent but it will be in the resurrection. A spiritualized body means that the condition of the body will be determined by the state of the spirit. If the man is righteous, his body will shine like the sun (Matthew 13.43); if he is wicked he will not be able to hide his rottenness as he can do now, but it will be exposed in all its misery in the state of his body. This is what we mean when we say people will have "spiritualized bodies" in the resurrection. Note clearly that the resurrection thus leads to a spiritualized *body* and not just to a risen *spirit*. The Bible puts it like this:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. *1 Corinthians 15.42-44*

It is the body itself that is buried in a perishable state and it is the *same body* that is raised imperishable. This passage shows quite plainly that it is the same physical *body*, buried as a seed is sown into the ground, which will be raised as a spiritual *body*. This is plain Biblical teaching which Deedat so obviously misrepresents.

In 2 Corinthians S. 1-4 the Bible again makes it clear that it is not the wish of true believers to become exposed spirits without bodies. Rather they long for their mortal bodies to be replaced by spiritual bodies which are immortal.

Once again we find that Deedat's efforts to discredit Christianity come purely from suppositions based on his own inadequate knowledge of the Bible, and he appears to be one of those who are guilty of "reviling in matters of which they are ignorant" (2 Peter 2.12). Jesus' own statement that he had appeared in fulfillment of the prophecies that the Messiah would rise from the dead on the third day shows quite plainly that there is no foundation whatsoever for Deedat's attempts to prove that Jesus had come down alive from the cross.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and in his own body ascended to heaven not long thereafter. He has gone to prepare a place for those who love him and who will follow him all their days as Lord and Saviour of their lives. When he returns he will raise them too from the dead and will clothe them with immortal bodies, granting them access to his eternal kingdom which he waits to reveal at the last time. True Christians can confidently say:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself. *Philippians 3.20-21*

During 1977 Deedat also published a small booklet which plagiarized the title of a book written by Frank Morison entitled *Who Moved the Stone?* Much of this booklet attempts once again to prove the theory that Jesus came down alive from the cross, and as we have already seen that this theory has no substance, it does not seem necessary to deal at any length with the points Deedat raises to promote it. We need only show, yet again, that he has had to resort to obvious absurdities to try and make his theory stick.

For example, he endeavours to prove that Mary Magdalene must have been looking for a live Jesus when she came to anoint his body. Although anointing a body was part of the normal *burial* custom of the Jews, he cannot accept this as it refutes his argument, so he suggests that the body of Jesus would have already been rotting within if he had died on the cross, saying 'if we massage a rotting body, it will fall to pieces' (Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.3), even though Mary came to the tomb only some thirty-nine hours after Jesus had died. It is absolute scientific nonsense to say that a body will fall to pieces within forty-eight hours of a man's decease! If there was any merit in his argument, Deedat would hardly have found it necessary to resort to such a ridiculous statement.

He likewise has to overlook obvious probabilities when he says that, when Mary Magdalene sought to take away the body of Jesus (John 20.15), she could only have been thinking of helping him to walk away and could not have **intended to carry away** a corpse. He claims that **she was a frail Jewess** who could not carry a corpse of at least a hundred and sixty pounds, wrapped with another 'hundred pounds weight of aloes and myrrh' (John 19.39) making a neat bundle of 260 pounds" (Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.8).

There is a far more probable explanation for Mary's statement that she would carry away the body of Jesus. There is nothing to say that she intended to carry it away all by herself. When she first found the body removed from the tomb she rushed to Jesus' disciples Peter and John and told them:

"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him". *John 20.2*

The other Gospels make it plain that Mary was not alone when she first went to the tomb that Sunday morning and that among the women who accompanied her were Joanna and Mary the mother of James (Luke 24.10). This is why she said "*we* do not know where they have laid him". As it was only after Peter and John had gone to the tomb that she first saw Jesus there is no reason to suppose that she did not intend to enlist the help of these two disciples or of the other women to help her carry the body away.

In any event there is concrete evidence in the Bible that Mary Magdalene believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and this brings us to the whole theme of Deedat's booklet, namely "who moved the stone?". His conclusion is that it was removed by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two of Jesus' disciples who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. He says in his booklet:

It was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the two stalwarts who did not leave the Master in the lurch when he was most in need. These two had given to Jesus a Jewish burial (?) bath, and wound the sheets with the 'aloes and myrrh' and temporarily moved the stone into place, if at all; they were the same two real friends who removed the stone, and took their shocked Master soon after dark, that same Friday night to a more congenial place in the immediate vicinity for treatment. (Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.12).

He begins his booklet with an expression of hope that he would be able to give 'a satisfactory answer to this problem (p.1) and the cover of his booklet carries a comment by Dr. G.M. Karim which describes the moving of the stone as a 'problem besetting the minds of all thinking Christians'. The impression is thus given that the Bible is silent on this subject and that Christians are beset with a problem and have to speculate as to who moved the stone. This is sheer nonsense for the Bible *plainly* says (to use Deedat's words, in the "clearest language humanly possible"):

An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. *Matthew 28.2*

Can there really be any "problem" about this matter? Is it too hard to believe that an angel from heaven could roll back the stone? According to the Bible it took **just two** angels to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19.13) and it took only one angel to wipe out Sennacherib's whole army of a hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers (2 Kings 19.35). On another occasion a single angel stretched forth his hand to destroy the whole city of Jerusalem before the Lord called on him to stay his hand (2 Samuel 24.16). So it should surprise no one to read that it was *an angel* who moved the stone.

The Qur'an plainly states that all faithful Muslims must not only believe in Allah but also in the *malatikah*, the angels (Surah 2.285), and one of the six major tenets of a Muslim's *iman* is belief in angels. Not only so, but the Qur'an agrees that the angels who came to Abraham and Lot told them that they had come to destroy the city where Lot dwelt (Surah 29.31-34), named as Sodom in the Bible.

The Qur'an therefore imposes on Muslims not only belief in angels but also in their awesome power over the affairs of men and the substance of the earth. No Muslim can therefore sincerely object to the statement in the Bible that it was an angel who moved the stone. Why then does Deedat overlook this plain statement in the Bible and falsely suggest that the identity of the person who moved the stone is a "problem"? Why is there no mention in his book let of the verse which plainly states that it was an angel who moved the stone? The reason

is that his theory that Jesus was taken down alive from the cross and that Mary was looking for a live Jesus is flatly contradicted by what this same angel immediately said to Mary:

"Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you". *Matthew 28.5-7*

The angel plainly told Mary and the other women to tell the disciples that Jesus, who had been *annoyed*, had also now *risen from the dead*. They immediately fled from the tomb with trembling and astonishment" (Mark 16.8). If they had thought that Jesus had survived the cross they would have been anything but surprised to find him gone from the tomb. But they had come to find a dead body and were absolutely amazed to find an angel telling them in the "clearest language humanly possible that Jesus had *risen from the dead*."

So we find that Deedat not only has to promote absurdities to support his arguments but also has to suppress plain statements in the Bible which refute them completely. We urge all Muslims to read the Bible itself and to discover its wonderful truths instead of reading Deedat's booklets which so obviously pervert its teaching and promote alternatives that are full of absurdities as this booklet has constantly shown.

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