

Does the Bible Speak of Muhammad? (Part 2 – the Torah)

As we have seen, Muslims expect to find references to Muhammad in the Bible. They have been told that when Jesus spoke in the Injeel of a Comforter who was to come, he was referring to Jesus. When we looked at the words of Jesus, however, we see that he could not have been speaking of Muhammad, but rather he was foretelling the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles.

THE TORAH

As for the Law of Moses, Muslims think that Deuteronomy 18:15,17-19 clearly speaks of Muhammad.

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear...” (Most translations read, “from among your brethren.”) Moses reminded the people that when they were at the foot of Mount Sinai, where the Torah, i.e. the Law, was given, they had asked not to hear the voice of God himself anymore, lest they die. “And the Lord said to me, ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.’”

Muslims see several similarities between Moses and Muhammad and draw the conclusion that Muhammad is the very prophet whose coming is predicted in this passage. For example, both Moses and Muhammad were married men with children, both emigrated after becoming targets for assassination, both led their followers to war and victory, and both gave a Law and a detailed code of conduct. On the other hand, one can easily see a number of similarities between Moses and Jesus, also. For instance, shortly after his birth, Jesus was saved by God from certain death, as was Moses. Jesus and Moses were both transfigured on a mountain in such a way that their faces shone (Exodus 34:29,30 et Matthew 17:1-5). Each of them interceded before God on behalf of guilty men. Each of them inaugurated, through sacrificial blood, a covenant between God and men.

But instead of trying to see if Muslims or Christians can come up with the longest list of similarities, let us look more closely at the criteria

mentioned in the prophecy concerning the prophet who was to come. Here are the two criteria to be examined:

1. Moses told the people of Israel that the Lord would raise up a prophet “from your midst, from your brethren;”
2. God said that this prophet would be “like” Moses.

“FROM YOUR BRETHREN”

Muslim commentators like to emphasize the expression “raise up from your brethren” and suggest that the Israelites are not their own brethren, that God was surely speaking of one of Israel’s “brother peoples.” According to them, one should seek this prophet among the nations which were related to the Israelites and not among the Israelites themselves. To identify the nations that were “related” to Israel, one would go back in history to find out which nations originated with the brothers of Israel’s ancestors. For example, the father of the Israelite nation was called Israel, or Jacob, and he had a brother named Esau. The descendants of Esau were the Edomites. There is a Bible passage, Deuteronomy 2:4,8, in which the Edomites are called the “brothers” of the Israelites. If one goes back a little farther, one finds that Jacob’s father, who was named Isaac, had some half-brothers: Ishmael, Midian, Zimran, Medan, and others. According to the idea advanced by some Muslims, one could consider that the Ishmaelites (Arabs are descendants of Ishmael), the Midianites and the others would be “brothers” of the nation of Israel. Muhammad, being an Arab, would be among the brothers of the Israelites. It should be noted, however, that the Bible never uses the term “brothers” in speaking of the Ishmaelites (or Arabs), the Midianites, or the other peoples descended from Abraham.

Even if we wanted to consider these other peoples as “brother-nations” to Israel, however, that would not establish that the prophet predicted by Moses could come from one of them. First, it would be necessary to take out the first part of what Moses said: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Since Moses was speaking to Israel, the words “from your midst” must necessarily refer to Israel; so the prophet would be an Israelite. But secondly, we would have to interpret the words “from your brethren” in an unusual not to say totally

bizarre manner. Who among us, if we were told to call one of our “brothers” to be given an important job or position of authority, would draw the conclusion that the members of our own family were excluded and that we had to find a man whose ancestors had been, hundreds of years earlier, related to our ancestors?

As for the expression “from your brethren,” we have a parallel in the preceding chapter. In Deuteronomy 17:14,15, Moses says to Israel, “You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” Throughout their history the Israelites never set over themselves a non-Israelite king. God chose neither an Ishmaelite, nor an Edomite, nor a Midianite, nor someone from any other nation to reign over his people. He first designated Saul, who was an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, and then the family of David, who was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah.

It is clear that the prophet whose coming was predicted by Moses would be an Israelite, which disqualifies Muhammad as the fulfillment of this prophecy.

THAT WHICH SET MOSES APART

Let us return to the second criterion: the prophet would be “like” Moses. We have already recognized that in many ways Muhammad was indeed like Moses; in the same way, Jesus was, in various respects, like Moses. But according to the Bible itself, what set Moses apart from the other Israelites or even from the other prophets? What would allow the people of Israel to recognize one day that they were listening to the one who was “the prophet like Moses”?

The last chapter of Deuteronomy contains these words of praise concerning Moses: “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). These words are generally attributed to the pen of Joshua, the inspired author of the following book in the Jewish scriptures. The author does not say that such a prophet could never again appear among the people of Israel, but that at the time of his writing they had not yet seen anyone like Moses.

What we want to notice especially is this passage are the distinguishing traits of Moses:

1. the fact that God knew Moses face to face; and
2. the great miracles and signs performed by Moses.

In regard to the first trait, God himself drew attention to it in Numbers 12. He used to speak to other prophets through visions or dreams, or he sent angels to communicate his messages to them. In Numbers 12.7,8, however, God says, “Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord.” In this respect we cannot say that Muhammad was like Moses. Muhammad never made such a claim. Muslims generally say that it was the angel Gabriel who gave Muhammad the words of the Qur’an, on behalf of God, of course. We would say that he played the role of an intermediary, or go-between. In Surah 53:2-9 – *Al-Najm*), for example, Allah says, “Your companion has neither strayed nor is he misguided, nor does he speak out of his own desire. It [the Qur’an] is nothing but revelation sent down to him. He was taught by [an angel] who is mighty in power, and endowed with wisdom; who in time manifested himself; standing poised at the highest point on the horizon, then came down close until he was two bow-lengths away or even closer and revealed to God’s servant what he revealed.” As for Jesus, his way of speaking recalls much more the description of Moses that we read. Jesus told the Jews in John 8:40, “But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.” Later, in John 12:49, he said, “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak... What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (ESV).

The second trait which distinguished Moses from the other prophets was the number and the power of the miracles that he did by God’s will and which clearly attested to the fact that it was the Lord who had sent him to deliver Israel and who was the author of the laws and commandments that Moses was passing on to the people. In regard to Muhammad, a reading of the Qur’an reveals that he was not doing miracles as Moses had done. At least seven times one reads that the adversaries of Muhammad asked him, “Why has no sign been sent down to him from his Lord?” In these passages various responses are given: “Say, ‘Signs are granted only by God.’ How can you tell

that if a sign be given to them, they will indeed believe in it?” (Surah 6:109 – *Al-An’am*). “Say: ‘I but follow what is revealed to me from my Lord. This (the Qur’an) is nothing but evidences from your Lord, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe” (Surah 7:203 – *Al-A’araḥ*). “Tell them, ‘God alone has knowledge of the unseen. So wait; I too will wait with you” (Surah 10:20 – *Yunus*). “Say, ‘The signs are in the hands of God. I am but a plain warner” (Surah 29:50 – *Al-Ankabut*). In no case does Allah give Muhammad the miraculous power to perform a sign resembling the miracles for which Moses was well known and which might have silenced his adversaries.

The contemporaries of Jesus, on the other hand, all recognized the great power that he had from God. In their preaching the apostles appealed to these signs when they called on the multitudes to believe in Jesus. In Acts 2:22 the apostle Peter described him as “Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know.” Even his enemies were unable to deny the miracles: “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him” (John 11:47,48). In this respect, as well, we see that it is Jesus who was a prophet like Moses.

That is just the conclusion that people drew back then. In John 1:45 we see that very early in the ministry of Jesus “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” Jesus himself recognized that Moses had spoken of him: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46). Finally, in their preaching the apostles clearly linked the prophecy in Deuteronomy to the person of Jesus Christ. Peter told the Jewish crowd, “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you...’ All the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days... To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:22,24,26).

As we have seen, Muhammad was not the Comforter of whom Jesus spoke. Nor was he the prophet of whom Moses spoke. According to the Injeel, we do not need to guess of whom Moses was

speaking when he referred to a prophet like himself. That prophet was Jesus of Nazareth. So let us not forget to do what Moses recommended doing in regard to this prophet whenever he came: let us listen to him.