

The Unlettered Prophet

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In response to a request made by the Israelites, Moses told his people, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." He told them further, "The Lord said to me: '...I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account'" (Deuteronomy 18: 15-18).

The word 'brother'

The Qur'an states: 'The unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures) - in the Law and the Gospel . . . ' (Sura 7:157). Elsewhere, the Qur'an addressing Muhammad's fellow people in Mecca states, 'We have sent to you a messenger, to be a witness concerning you, as we sent a messenger to Pharaoh' (Sura 73:15). Thus, some Muslim friends believe that the prophecy in Deuteronomy is about Muhammad (Ata' Ullah Kalim ,Synopsis of Religious Preaching: Christianity and Islam, pp38-41 (Silver Spring: Majlis Ansarullah, 1998); Ahmad Deedat ,Muhammad in the Bible , p. 3 ff. (Birmingham: Islamic Propagation, 1984).

The Christian response to such claims is that, as the Qur'an is taken to be its own exposition, the same should apply to the

Bible. We find that the word "brothers" in this passage does not refer to another nation, but to Israel, Even if we leave the rest of the Torah on one side and just look in Deuteronomy, we will be able to remove any misunderstanding. In this book alone the word "brothers" is used about 48 times, referring to Israelites every time. Not once is it used for Ishmaelites or Arabs.

The first two verses of the same chapter of Deuteronomy tell us, "The priests who are Levites - indeed the whole tribe of Levi - are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel... They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them" (Deut. 18:1-2).

Tribes of Israel as "brothers"

From this passage we learn that the Levites are a tribe of Israel and the word "brothers" mentioned in verse 2 refers to the other eleven tribes of Israel. Just one chapter before this, we read how God advised Moses to instruct the Israelites to choose a king. He told them, "Be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers" (Deut 17:15). There is no mention of Ishmaelites as brothers of the tribes of Israel. The Israelites always chose kings from among their own twelve tribes.

In the light of this, Christians understand that when the promise of the Prophet was given the Israelites understood that he was to be from among them and was to be their brother.

The Qur'anic example

A prophet is a brother of those among whom he is born and to whom he is sent. We can find examples in the Qur'an. A prophet Hud is called the brother of the tribe A'd (Surah 7: 65). We find the same about two other prophets, Salih and Shuaib (Surah 7: 73; 85). Thus when Moses was given the good news of the coming prophet, it was understood that he was to rise from among the Israelites.

Attributes of the Prophet like Moses

This Prophet was to come in the likeness of Moses. According to the Torah, the one like Moses has to show two prominent signs:

1. God should speak to him directly
2. He should be a mighty miracle worker (Deut. 34:1-21).

About Moses, we learn that God spoke to him face to face and gave him his commandments directly (Exodus 33:11). Muslims recognise this attribute of his and call him "Kalim-u-llah", with whom God conversed. However, Muhammad did not receive the revelation of the Qur'an directly from God. The Qur'an suggests that God sent his words to Muhammad through Gabriel and other means (Surah 2:97). In contrast, we see that God not only spoke to Jesus, but that he is His Word (John 1:1;

Sura 3:45). The first sign is fulfilled in Jesus.

The second sign of this coming Prophet was to be a mighty sign and miracle worker. In the Gospel and also in the Qur'an, we find that Jesus was the greatest miracle worker (Surah 19:21; 5: 110, 111, 113). In contrast, we find that Muhammad was not granted such a facility (Surah 29:50).

The Fulfilment

When Jesus spoke and people witnessed his signs and wonders, they proclaimed, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote" (John 1: 45). We also read in the Gospel that when people saw the miraculous signs that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6: 14). The apostles of Jesus also proclaimed that Jesus had fulfilled the prophecy given through Moses (Acts 3:11-26; 7:37-60).

Jesus himself claimed that Moses and other prophets wrote about his coming (Luke 24:44). He rebuked some unbelieving Jews of his time, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (John 5:46). He further said, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24; cf. Deut. 18:19).

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