Peripheral Vision

More than a Prophet:
John the Baptist and the Question "Is Muhammad among the Prophets?"

by George Bristow

"So, what do you think of Muhammad?" I have often been confronted with this challenging question during my 30 years in Turkey. Without giving reasons for rejecting Muhammad as the final prophet, I sometimes answer, "Jesus said, 'I am the first and the last,' and as a Christian I believe that he will be with his followers until he returns at the end of this age."[1] At times I talk about Joseph Smith, whom Mormons believe to be a great prophet. Although Smith spoke very highly of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon subverts the biblical story line at various points and so I cannot affirm his claim to be a prophet. Because of obvious parallels with Islam (divine revelation and a "final" prophet centuries after Christ), Muslim questioners understand my Christian position regarding Muhammad without requiring that my position be spelled out.[2] The point is clear: because these later writings (the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon) do not cohere with the biblical witness to God's final act through Jesus, I do not see their proclaimers as trustworthy prophets. This approach to evaluating prophecy is analogous to the early church's use of the "rule of faith"—a summary of the biblical metanarrative joining the confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior with the confession of God as Creator.[3]

In his provocative article, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" (*IJFM* 31:4 [Oct-Dec 2014)], 169–190), Harley Talman offers a very different answer to this challenge, arguing that there is "theological, missiological, and historical sanction for expanding constricted categories of prophethood to allow Christians to entertain the possibility of Muhammad being other than a false prophet." Talman's argument has stimulated thoughtful responses from Ayman and Azumah,[4] but because of the importance of this subject for missiology, I wish to revisit the question from the perspective of comparative theology, and from my own experience and research in Turkey.

To treat this issue adequately we must not only do biblical theology carefully but also examine the qur'anic picture as a whole. Representative Muslim scholars should be able to concede that I present the nature of prophethood in the Qur'an

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fairly, particularly in relation to Muhammad. In previous research on Abraham I argued that we need to think clearly about the partially overlapping biblical and qur'anic narratives.[5] Otherwise, our first impressions of common ground may turn out to be false positives, incorrectly indicating commonalities that do not stand up to scrutiny. Here I will focus especially on accounts of John the Baptist, son of Zachariah, as an instance of such overlapping narratives.

As we look at qur'anic and biblical concepts of prophecy and prophets, I will defend three propositions. First, Muhammad's prophethood is inseparable from the qur'anic prophet story pattern and needs to be examined as the epitome of this element of Muslim worldview. Second, biblical prophethood or prophecy is inseparable from the overarching biblical narrative which reaches its fulfillment with the coming of Jesus. Third, these two perspectives on prophethood are fundamentally incompatible.

Muhammad and the Qur'anic Prophets: Muhammad as the "Seal"

Talman states his intent to

> broaden our base of theological, historical and missiological understandings of prophethood in general and of the person of Muhammad in particular. (170)[6]

Since he rejects Islamic tradition as a reliable guide to understanding Muhammad,[7] I will focus on the qur'anic prophethood material, particularly the "prophet stories" found throughout the text. Concerning the overall unity of the Qur'an, Ruthven says:

> The seemingly chaotic organization of the material ensures that each of the parts in some way represents the whole… any one of the *surahs* will contain, in a more or less condensed form, the message of the whole.[8]

This coherence is evident in the prophethood material. Numerous prophet stories appealed to throughout the Qur'an flesh out the concept of prophethood. These narratives generally follow a pattern in which the community rejects the messenger, but God vindicates the prophet and punishes the unbelieving community. These fragmentary episodes provide moral examples, underscoring the danger of rejecting the messengers of God and warning the audience to beware how they receive the Prophet (Muhammad) and his message.

Qur'anic prophets are sent to different human communities to proclaim ethical monotheism: "We sent a messenger to every community, saying, 'Worship God and shun false gods'" (16:36).[9]

Muhammad's prophethood is inseparable from the qur'anic prophet story pattern.

The Qur'an, which is disclosed to the final messenger, describes itself as "guidance for mankind" (2:185). No society will be judged before being warned by a prophet, who may even testify against them in the judgment (10:47; 39:69). Unless we deny that Muhammad is the primary addressee in qur'anic discourse, as some do,[10] we find him presented there as the epitome of prophethood: "Muhammad . . . is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets" (Q33:40).[11]

Muslim scholars have recognized that this qur'anic pattern diverges from the biblical salvation-history concept of God redeeming a particular people through a series of covenant-making acts. Al Faruqi, for example, rejects the biblical pattern as unworthy of God:

> The so-called "saving acts of God" in Hebrew Scripture, Islam regards as the natural consequences of virtue and good deeds… The "Promise" of Hebrew Scripture, or the unearned blessing of any man or people, the Qur'an utterly rejects as inconsonant with God's nature and His justice; the Muslims being no more unfit for such favoritism than any other people.[12]

Whether or not al Faruqi misrepresents the biblical concept of God's election of grace with the phrase "such favoritism," he correctly represents the qur'anic position as deeply different from it. The lives of qur'anic prophets support its rhetoric and worldview, in which they function as models for believers. Salvation comes through "virtue and good deeds," above all by avoiding the unforgivable sin of *shirk* or idolatry (Q4:48, 116; cf. 39:65; 34:22; 31:13).

The close relationship between Abraham and Muhammad displays this qur'anic prophet portrait clearly, especially the story of Abraham disputing with idolaters, which is found in eight suras in different forms.[13] The Qur'an narrates how Abraham deduces the reality of God from the evidence of creation and boldly rebukes his kinfolk (6:78–84). In some accounts, Abraham is cast into a fire by his adversaries but is miraculously protected.[14] As Muhammad is being mocked by idolaters, God assures him that other messengers have been mocked before him (6:10) and that he has been guided into "an upright religion, the faith of Abraham" (6:161).

Like Abraham, John (Yahya), the son of Zachariah, also functions in this role of model messenger in the Qur'an.[15] In 6:84–86 he is listed among the prophets whom God chose and "guided on a straight path." Like all qur'anic prophets, John's exemplary character is underscored: "He will be noble and chaste, a prophet, one of the righteous"

(3:39; 19:12–14). His birth story, which forms part of Mary's story in the Qur'an, has elements in common with the narrative in Luke 1:5–20.[16] But we find nothing of his ministry or crucial New Testament (NT) role as Jesus' forerunner, which, as we will see below, is key for understanding the biblical perspective on prophets.

While stories of qur'anic prophets are found in a variety of detail and are certainly not identical to one another, their DNA is consistent. The qur'anic portrait of Muhammad as the ideal and final prophet is built upon and inseparable from this qur'anic prophet model.

Jesus and the Biblical Prophets: John as the "Seal"

If Muhammad cannot be separated from the larger qur'anic narrative, neither can biblical prophets be separated from the overarching biblical narrative. The Hebrew prophets arise within Israel, the people uniquely "known" by God (Amos 3:2). With rare exceptions (e.g., Jonah), they prophesy in Israel, charging God's people to live by His covenant.[17] Biblically speaking, "the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2) and as Vanhoozer says

> the task of interpreting Israel's history…fell first to the prophets. It was their interpretive words that made sense of God's saving deeds.[18]

Biblical use of the category of prophetic activity is not systematic, but varied and complex.[19] It may therefore be useful to distinguish the activity of prophesying from the "vocation" of prophet as it came to be understood. Prophetic activity, for example, even included temple singers who, though not prophets, "prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the Lord" (1 Chron. 25:1–3).

While the phenomenon of prophecy was prevalent throughout the ancient Near East and similar terminology was used for these figures and the Hebrew prophets, there were also significant

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differences, above all the nature of the gods they served.[20] Another was that outside of Israel "there is no evidence that ancient Near Eastern prophecy ever fundamentally questioned the monarchy."[21] By contrast, the "prophets of the Lord," who spoke his word whether favorable or not to the regime,[22] were frequently in conflict with false prophets who flattered the kings of Israel. These are typically either idolatrous "prophets of Baal and prophets of the Asherah" (1 Kings 18) or "prophets of the deception of their own heart," who claimed to represent the Lord (Jer. 23:26). Often these false prophets served along with diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, or sorcerers (Jer. 27:9). "The leading traits of their 'revelations' are mixing of falsity and truth (Jer. 23:28) and stealing Yahweh's words from other sources," such as dreams and other prophets (23:30–32).[23]

At the core of genuine prophethood was "covenantal integrity" embodied in personal contact with the living God, obedience to covenant provisions, and loyalty to his Davidic kingdom promises. God said of false prophets, "if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people" (Jer. 23:22). The life-changing calls of Isaiah and Ezekiel came from the throne of God symbolized by the ark of the covenant in the temple (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; cf. Rev. 4–5). The prophets relay both God's anguish over his disobedient children and his intent to restore a remnant after the inevitable judgment falls.

It is against this background that we should place Saul, with whom Talman begins his consideration of Muhammad's reputation among Christians. Saul's surprising "prophesying" prompted the reaction, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:10–13). Yet Saul is not said to be a prophet, but only to have "prophesied with the prophets" under the Spirit's influence. Years later Saul, controlled by jealousy, sent messengers to capture David, who had been anointed king by the prophet Samuel.[24] Saul's messengers "also prophesied" when they approached the ecstatic company of prophets (19:20–21), yet the messengers were not called prophets. Although the Spirit had long since "departed from him" (16:14), Saul "prophesied" again (19:23–24). He finally consulted a banned medium when God no longer answered him. The experience of being moved to ecstasy and prophesying under the powerful influence of God's Spirit does not make one a prophet of God. Nor is the case of Saul a likely point of common ground with Muslims, since the comparison of Muhammad with sinful Saul contradicts the consistent qur'anic portrait of prophets as exemplary and protected by God from significant sin.

There are no clear biblical references to genuine prophets outside of the covenant people of God. Paul once quotes a pagan prophet from Crete as "a prophet of their own" (Titus 1:12; cf. Acts 17:28), but not as a prophet of the Lord.[25] Balaam, who superficially appears to be an exception, on closer scrutiny turns out to represent a pattern of false prophecy. God's Spirit came upon Balaam and he spoke divine oracles (Num. 24:2). Yet Moses' soldiers later executed him for helping the Midianites lead Israel into idolatry (Num. 31:8, 16). Moreover, in the most important NT reflection on Balaam, Peter speaks of "the prophet's madness," and uses Balaam as a memorable example of "false prophets" (2 Peter 2:1, 16).[26] Thus Balaam is clear evidence that simply communicating words from God does not make one a genuine prophet of God.

We see this same phenomenon in the New Testament. Even Caiaphas, the high priest who conspired to have Jesus executed, unwittingly but truly "prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation" (John 11:44–52). The outpouring of the Spirit makes prophecy a central reality of God's new covenant people (Acts 2:1–36). Yet even if NT prophecy can be both legitimate and fallible as some argue,[27] identifying and rejecting false prophecy remains essential (1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Peter 2:1; 3:1–2; 1 John 4:1–6).[28] The essential criteria is loyalty to the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord, whose apostolic gospel was once for all delivered to the saints by his apostles and prophets (Jude 3; Eph. 2:20–22; 4:11).

A robust Christian understanding of prophecy must also reckon with the epochal change introduced by the arrival of Jesus Christ. Here we return to John the Baptist, who epitomizes biblical prophecy from the perspective of the Evangelists. We saw above that in the Qur'an John is simply one of the prophets. But Jesus speaks of him as something more akin to the "seal" of the prophets:

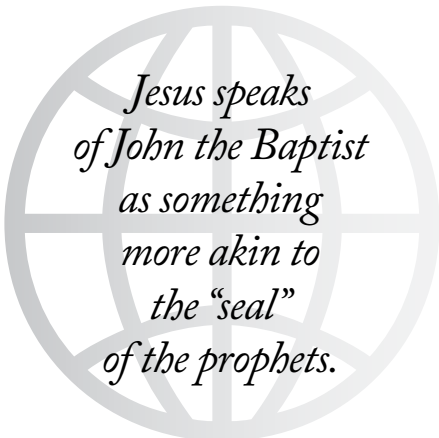
> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he... All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. (Matt. 11:11–14)

John was a genuine prophet of God, his calling announced by the angel Gabriel in the temple sanctuary and by Zachariah's prophecy.[29] He arose among the covenant community and proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But as the promised "messenger," whose coming heralds the arrival of God himself, he was "more than a prophet" and identified by Jesus as the greatest person born to that point.

All four Gospels begin their accounts of Jesus' ministry with John's arrival and cite Isaiah 40:1–11 and Malachi 3:1 to identify him as the forerunner. In both Old Testament (OT) passages, the one whose way is being prepared is the creator God, coming at last to restore his people.[30] Jesus thus gives his disciples a framework for understanding God's progressive self-revelation in relation to John and to himself:

> Moses/prophets ⟶ Final OT prophet (forerunner) ⟶ The Son[31] ⟶ NT prophets

In the parable of the tenants, Jesus shows that God (the landlord), after sending many prophets (the servants), has finally sent his son (Matt. 21:33–46).



He also announces to Jerusalem that as the Son he will send them "prophets and wise men and scribes" to announce his reign (Matt. 23:34; see 24:14; 28:18–20). The author of Hebrews works within this same framework: God, who spoke *through the prophets* in past ages, is now speaking "in these last days" *by his Son,* (Heb. 1:1–2).

John felt himself unworthy as Jesus' lowly servant (Luke 3:16) and introduced him with glowing words brimming with OT prophecy:

- "He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me." (John 1:15, 30) — Jesus is the pre-existent Coming One. (Ps. 118:26; Mic. 5:2; Mal. 3:1)
- "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Luke 3:16) — Jesus is the giver of the eschatological Spirit. (Isa. 59:20–21; Joel 2:30)
- "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Luke 3:17) — Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. (Mal. 4:1–3).
- "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." (John 1:32) — Jesus is the Spirit-endowed Messiah and Servant-Priest. (Isa. 11:1; 42:1; 61:1)
- "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) — Jesus is God's own sacrificial Lamb. (Gen. 22:8, 14; Isa. 53:6–7)
- "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom." (John 3:29) — Jesus is the coming "Bridegroom" of God's people. (Isa. 62:4–5)

The NT apostles and prophets confirm and develop John's witness, preaching the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord to Jews and "God-fearers" with direct citations of the prophets,[32] and to Gentile hearers with the biblical metanarrative in the background (Acts 14:15–17; 17:24–31).[33] They insist that "all the prophets" proclaimed these messianic days (Luke 24:25; Acts 3:24; 1 Peter 10–12). New Testament prophets, along with the apostles, unfold the unsearchable riches of Christ to the people of God (Eph. 3:4–10). The test of prophecy is henceforth full conformity to the Spirit-revealed testimony that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).

Thus, from the standpoint of biblical theology, Jesus' era is the finale of salvation history. There can be no return to pre-Jesus prophecy, at least none which does not submit to the corrective teaching of Christian evangelists (Acts 18:25–26) and to baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1–10). Paul makes this clear to the Athenians: "The times of ignorance God

overlooked, *but now* he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30–31). Despite suggestions by Talman (179) that we might think of Muhammad as a "BC-like prophet during an AD time frame,"[34] we find no evidence in the New Testament for the possibility of another "preparatory economy" like God provided in OT salvation history.[35]

In the Old Testament, prophecy highlights God's dwelling place in Jerusalem and the priestly worship based on the law of Moses and the commandments through David and the prophets (2 Chron. 29:25–30; 36:15–16). Jesus' inauguration of the "new" covenant promised by prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel brings not only the fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom through Jesus, son of David and son of God, but also of the priesthood through Christ's once-for-all sacrifice and ministry at God's right hand (Heb. 8–10), of God's law now written on hearts as the law of Christ (2 Cor. 3; Heb. 8; 1 Cor. 9:21), and of Christ's worldwide "body" as the true dwelling place of God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22; 3:). The New Testament concludes with John's prophecy of Christ's "bride" as the holy temple-city (Rev. 21:9–22:5). Considering this advancing purpose of God, there can be no return to a geographical center of worship on earth, whether Rome, Mecca, or Salt Lake City.

Incompatible Perspectives on Muhammad's Prophethood

We can more clearly see the incompatibility of biblical and qur'anic concepts of prophethood by pairing the main elements of the qur'anic and biblical worldviews. I have argued elsewhere that the essential three elements of the Muslim worldview are Tawhid (divine unity), Prophethood, and Afterlife, and that these may be usefully juxtaposed with the elements of a biblical worldview framework summarized as "creation, fall, redemption, consummation," resulting in the following set of pairs or correspondences:

We can see the incompatibility of biblical and qur'anic concepts of prophethood by pairing the main elements of their worldviews.

Creation-Fall – Tawhid

Redemption – Prophethood

Consummation – Afterlife

While the first and last of these pairings share some common ground, the middle pair, redemption and prophethood, radically diverge and ultimately tell different stories of God and humanity.[36] These divergent narratives also correspond to very different diagnoses of what is wrong with the world. In the biblical worldview God brings redemption to *fallen* humanity (through Christ); in the qur'anic worldview he provides reminders and guidance to *forgetful* humanity (through prophets). While the Bible underscores God's repeated entries into and powerful action within history, the qur'anic version of human history highlights God's repeated sending of prophets. The comparison of the biblical John as the coming Lord's unique forerunner with the qur'anic John sharpens this dissonance.

Muslim writers are clear that the biblical concept of *God coming tangibly into the world* is incompatible with the qur'anic Tawhid principle. For Shah, the tension caused by the "amalgamation of anthropomorphic and transcendental tendencies" of the Hebrew Bible becomes unbearable in the NT: "Incarnational theology is not paradoxical. It is thoroughly and utterly contradictory."[37] Muslims see the Qur'an, revealed to Muhammad, as correcting the Jewish error of making God too immanent and the Christian error of deifying a prophet. Yet this biblical revelation of the God of Israel condescending to come among us is at the heart of its prophetic witness.

Hebrew prophecy gives great significance to the *temple and priestly sacrificial system,*[38] looking for its fulfillment in the "last days" (e.g., Ezek. 40–48).[39] The New Testament announces this fulfillment in Jesus and his new covenant kingdom of priests. But the qur'anic perspective not only allows neither "intercession" nor "ransom" in the "Day when no soul will stand in place of another" (2:48; cf. 6:164; 17:15) but also, as traditionally understood, rejects Jesus' death by crucifixion (4:157)[40] and makes nothing of his present universal priestly role. Here the qur'anic John's simple prophet role diverges deeply from priestly-born John's prophetic declaration of Jesus as the "Lamb of God."

The biblical John warns of the "wrath to come" and points to Jesus himself as the judge who will separate wheat from chaff (Matt. 3:7–12). In the qur'anic message, belief in the afterlife is second only in importance to belief in God. The prophets continually remind forgetful humanity of God and "the Day."[41] Talman asserts that "the emphasis of [Muhammad's] eschatological proclamation was Christ's Second Advent" (185). Yet if we base our understanding of Muhammad's prophethood on the Qur'an, this is a dubious statement. While there is extensive para-qur'anic Muslim exegetical literature that expects Jesus' return in the eschaton, no qur'anic statement clearly affirms it. As Reynolds says:

> None of the events which Jesus is said by the [Muslim] exegetes to accomplish in the eschaton—killing al-Dajjāl, leading believers in prayer, breaking Crosses, killing swine (and Christians), etc.—are mentioned in the Quran.[42]

Despite similarities, there are deep differences between the qur'anic "afterlife" concept which emphasizes the soul's "return" to God and the biblical "consummation" concept which is built upon the resurrection and return of Jesus.[43]

Talman claims that:

> Jewish Christian Christology . . . would not have compromised the Abrahamic monotheism of the ḥunafā', as did the aberrant Christologies of the Christians that Muhammad refuted in the Qur'an. (173)

I have two concerns here. First, the New Testament writings diverge sharply from the Jewish exegetical narratives which parallel the Qur'an in many places and which were apparently known to pre-Islamic Arab monotheists.

Second, as Bauckham has demonstrated, the earliest Jewish Christian monotheism was a "Christological monotheism" which included Jesus "in the unique identity of this one God."[44] Thus the "Abrahamic monotheism" of the New Testament, in which Christ presents himself as the God of Abraham and the Lord of David (John 8:56–58; Matt. 22:41–46), has little in common with that expressed in the Qur'an. It does, however, have a lot in common with the Christology of the churches present in the Hijaz at the time of the emergence of Islam. Despite intense controversy over how to formulate the mystery, "the orthodox, the Monophysites, and the Nestorians were all agreed that He was both God and man."[45] The Qur'an insists that Jesus is only a messenger (Q 5:72–75; 4:171).

The presence of biblical concepts and para-biblical material in the Qur'an, especially given its use of the formula "remember . . ." when introducing prophet narratives, may be explained by their presence in the Jewish and Christian communities extant in the Hijaz. Yet we should remember that the New Testament explicitly warns against Jewish exegetical narratives and interpretive approaches which paint biblical figures in glowing colors (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; Titus 1:14). Watson shows how Paul is in "conversation" with second-Temple narratives in which Abraham is a paragon of virtue.[46] It seems to me that the Qur'an expands on these Jewish para-biblical "hero" stories and presents a very different narrative. While claiming to confirm the previous books,[47] it does not present a continuation, much less a concluding resolution, of this particular history.

A full biblical theology of Islam (or other religions) is beyond the scope of this paper.[48] God is indeed at work among peoples outside of the covenant community in a variety of ways, not leaving himself without witness (Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20). God does speak through visions, angels, and human representatives to individuals who need to hear the true prophetic word, such as Naaman whose servant girl told him of Elisha (2 Kings 5:1–4), and Cornelius whom the angelic vision prepared to hear Peter's "message by which you will be saved" (Acts 11:14). But neither Naaman nor Cornelius were thereby made prophets. Deciding if there is a biblical category which can include Muhammad as a prophet of God is a different question, one which requires a thorough assessment of the qur'anic prophet story pattern and the role of prophets in the overarching biblical narrative.

The Qur'an substitutes a different story for the gospel of God.

Talman cites with approval Bavinck's view that "God dealt with Muhammad and touched him."[49] Bavinck does indeed argue that:

> Buddha would never have meditated on the way of salvation if God had not touched him. Mohammed would never have uttered his prophetic witness if God had not concerned Himself with him. Every religion contains, somehow, the silent work of God.

But he also insists that man always subverts this silent work of God through *repression* and *substitution,* that the church must humbly testify in harmony with all the prophets, and that in Jesus Christ alone do we hear God's voice and see his image.[50]

In my view, the Qur'an *substitutes* a different story for "the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand *through his prophets* in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son . . ." (Rom. 1:1–4). Consequently, the qur'anic prophet model personified by Muhammad is ultimately incompatible with the biblical model in which "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10).

Missiological Implications

A gospel-centered hermeneutic is essential to seeing the Old Testament and New Testament writings as one book. As the seal of the biblical prophets, John the Baptist's ministry as Christ's forerunner clarified this hermeneutic, announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand. After his resurrection, Christ taught his followers to read the Scriptures in light of his suffering and subsequent glory (Luke 24:25–27, 32–34, 44–49; Acts 1:3). If we are going to use the Bible to evaluate Muhammad correctly and witness to Muslims convincingly, we must keep this interpretive grid clearly before us. This is, of course, essential to doing a biblical theology of any religion.

A reconstrual of Muhammad's prophethood which forces him into a quasi-Christian category, as a prophet bearing fallible witness to Jesus, does justice to neither the Bible nor the Qur'an. Respectfully confessing my belief in the uniqueness and finality of Jesus is therefore the best answer to the question of what I think of Muhammad. Telling the story of John the Baptist pointing to Jesus as the long-expected Savior and Jesus' testimony to John as "more than a prophet" may give clearer understanding why Muhammad does not fit into the biblical story.

Good witness often takes the hearers' worldview as a starting point, as Paul began his talk in Athens with a reference to the altar "to the unknown god" (Acts 17:23). But as Coleman notes, "Paul moved from commentary on the altar to a fairly significant rebuke of their worldview and practices while continuing to emphasize both their ignorance and culpability."[51] Witness to Muslims may well begin from their understanding of prophets and move to the Gospel, as Pennington proposes.[52] However, it is crucial in light of my findings here to keep in mind that biblical and qur'anic concepts of prophethood are deeply different. We should stress John's prophetic announcement of the glorious One who came after him and Jesus' own insistence that all the prophets spoke of him.

Whatever our biblical theology of religions, we do not respect Muslims by redefining Muhammad on our own terms. Rather we honor their seeking after God by standing with John, the prophet who was "more than a prophet," and directing them to the Lamb of God. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Rev. 1:17–18; Matt. 28:18–20.

[2] There are also parallels between Muslim and Mormon writings in their relationship to Jewish extra-biblical literature. See Bradley J. Cook, "The Book of Abraham and the Islamic Qiṣaṣ Al-Anbiyā' (Tales of the Prophets) Extant Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (2000).

[3] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 704.

[4] See *IJFM* issues in volumes 32 (2015) and 33 (2016).

[5] See George Bristow, *Sharing Abraham?: Narrative Worldview, Biblical and Qur'anic Interpretation and Comparative Theology in Turkey* (Cambridge, Mass: Doorlight Academic, 2017).

[6] Page numbers for Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets" are given in parentheses when it is cited.

[7] Talman aligns himself with scholars who "maintain that Muhammad's message should be interpreted in harmony with the previous Scriptures which it claimed to confirm, rather than rely on later traditions that contradict them" (170–71).

[8] Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 84.

[9] Unless otherwise noted I cite the translation of M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an,* Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[10] Rippin says, "it does seem that in no sense can the Qur'an be assumed to be a primary document in constructing the life of Muhammad." Andrew Rippin, "Muhammad in the Qur'an: Reading Scripture in the 21st Century," in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources,* ed. Harald Motzki (Boston: Brill, 2000), 307.

[11] This is one of four verses where Muhammad is mentioned by name (3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29).

[12] Isma'il R. al Faruqi, "A Comparison of the Islamic and Christian Approaches to Hebrew Scripture," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 31, no. 4 (1963): 286, 90.

[13] Qur'an 6:74–87; 19:41–50; 21:51–73; 26:69–102; 29:16–27; 37:83–100; 43:26–28; 60:4–7.

[14] Though this material has no parallels in the canonical Abraham narrative, many are found in Jewish para-biblical writings. See Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives,* Islamic History and Civilization (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[15] John is mentioned in four suras: 3:33–41; 6:84–90; 19:2–15; 21:83–91.

[16] These include the angelic announcement to his father Zachariah as he prays in the sanctuary and his mother's barrenness. Zachariah's dumbness comes in answer to his request for a sign, rather than a punishment as in Luke's account.

[17] OT prophecy also includes judgments on Israel's neighbors: Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, Tyre, Sidon (e.g., Isa. 13–25; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Dan. 4–5; Amos 1:3–15; Zech. 9:1–7; and the books of Obadiah and Nahum).

[18] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 50.

[19] A search for the words prophet, prophecy, prophesy, and cognates yields more than 550 verses, across biblical genres. Of these, 35% refer to individuals who are called "prophet" (or "prophetess") of God; 25% are plural references to "the prophets" sent by God to Israel (e.g., Neh. 9:26, 30); another 23% refer to "false prophets;" 12% refer to the "prophesying" activities of both true and false prophets; and 5% refer to "prophecy" as a phenomenon. For example, Daniel 9:24 speaks of an eschatological sealing of "vision and prophecy" and the NT refers to prophecy as a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12–14).

[20] See Karl Möller, "Prophecy and Prophets in the OT," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

[21] J. Stokl, "Ancient near Eastern Prophecy," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets,* ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 23.

[22] 1 Sam. 3:20; 1 Kings 18:4, 13, 22; 22:7–8; 2 Kings 3:11; 17:13; 2 Chron. 18:6, 13; 20:20; 28:9; 29:25; 36:16; Ezra 5:2.

[23] Ronald E. Manahan, "A Theology of Pseudoprophets: A Study in Jeremiah," *Grace Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (1980): 88.

[24] The role of Samuel, Nathan, and other prophets in announcing the reign of David and the Davidic Messiah is crucial, as Peter reminds the Jews of Jerusalem in Acts 3:24; see also 1 Chron. 29:29.

[25] "'Prophet' would then be a title of honor that attached itself to various historical (and legendary) figures known to have been great teachers and poets." Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 700.

[26] See also Deut. 23:4–5; Josh. 13:22; 24:9–10; Neh. 13:2; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Rev. 2:14.

[27] Most notably Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today,* Rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000). Talman affirms this position in footnotes 64 and 114.

[28] Jesus repeatedly warned his followers of false prophets to come (Matt. 7:15; 24:11, 24).

[29] Luke 1:11–20, 76–79.

[30] See Bristow, 30, endnote 42. On Jesus and the coming of God, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1996), 615–21.

[31] Jesus identifies himself in the context as the unique Son of God (Matt. 11:27).

[32] Acts 2:21–36 cites Pss. 16, 110, and 132; Acts 3:12–26 cites Deut. 18:15–19 and Gen. 22:18; Acts 4:8–12 cites Ps. 118 and Acts 4:24–28 cites Ps. 2. Stephen (7:52) and Philip preach the good news about Jesus from the prophets (Acts 8:27–35). Peter (Acts 10:43), Paul (Acts 13:16–41, citing Pss. 2 and 16, Isa. 49 and 55; Hab. 1) and James (15:13–18,

citing Amos 9:11–12) believed that the gospel was precisely what *all the prophets* had announced beforehand. Several begin specifically from John (Acts 1:22; see 10:27; 13:24–25).

[33] Note the movement from the ages before Jesus—"in past generations" and "the times of ignorance"—to the emphatic "*but now…*" of the final, post-resurrection era in which all peoples are commanded to repent and take refuge in Christ (Acts 14:16; 17:30).

[34] Citing Dudley Woodberry's lectures.

[35] For discussion of proposals that the Qur'an be seen as preparatory for Muslims see Doug Coleman, "A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology," EMS Dissertation Series (Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press, 2011), PhD Dissertation, 128–29.

[36] Bristow, 36–51.

[37] Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions: Representing the Unrepresentable* (Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2010), 661.

[38] It also insists that insincere sacrifices are abhorrent to God (e.g., Mal. 1).

[39] On the "expanding end-time purpose of temples" in the OT prophets, see, Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), 123–67.

[40] Q4:157 is interpreted differently by some: "God (and not the Jews!) first made Jesus die, and then made him ascend to heaven." Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?," *Bulletin of SOAS,* Vol. 72, no. 2 (2009): 240. Nevertheless, in 19:33 Jesus' death is treated just as that of John in 19:15.

[41] Bristow, 163–67.

[42] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus. Dead or Alive?," *Bulletin of SOAS,* Vol. 72, no. 2 (2009): 250. See also Zeki Sarıtoprak, *Islam's Jesus* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 23.

[43] Bristow, 47–51, 163–68.

[44] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 182.

[45] Theodore Sabo, *From Monophysitism to Nestorianism: AD 431–681* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 1. As Cragg argues, "The clause, from Nicea, 'of one substance with the Father' was not in question." Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 15–16. Block says, "It was Monophysitism that Muhammad likely encountered." C. Jonn Block, *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), Kindle Locations 911–12.

[46] Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 167–269.

[47] For example, "He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier" (Q3:3; cf. 2:91; 3:81; 5:48; 10:37).

[48] A recent evangelical entry is Daniel Strange, *'For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock': An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2014).

[49] J. H. Bavinck, *The Church between Temple and Mosque* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 125.

[50] Ibid., 200–05.

[51] Coleman, 59. See pp. 54–65 for discussion of Acts 17:15–34, particularly engaging Kevin Higgins, "The Key to Insider Movements: The 'Devoted's' of Acts," *IJFM,* Vol. 21, no. 4 (2004).

[52] Perry Pennington, "From Prophethood to the Gospel: Talking to Folk Muslims About Jesus," *IJFM,* Vol. 31, no. 4 (2014): 197–98.