Muhammad in the Bible

The idea that the Bible contains prophecies about the coming of Muhammad (peace be upon him), may surprise many people. It isn’t difficult to understand why, since the general perception people have of Muhammad (pbuh) is that of a man with no connection to Biblical Prophets or prophecies. However, taking a closer look at Muhammad’s (pbuh) life, it becomes clear that he upheld the basic tenets that the Biblical Prophets came with, and led millions to do the same. Indeed it is because of the teachings of Muhammad (pbuh) that billions of Muslims, since his time and until today, have revered the persons of Jesus, Moses and Abraham (peace be upon them all).

In this booklet, you will discover how the Bible foretells the coming of an Arabian prophet, specifically Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Although there are numerous prophecies about Muhammad (pbuh) scattered throughout the Bible, we are going to focus primarily on the 42nd chapter of the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Please note that all verses referenced from the Bible have been taken from the New International Version.

What Is Isaiah 42 About?

The 42nd chapter of the Book of Isaiah describes itself as a prophecy about the future. God states that:

…the former things have taken place, and new things I declare... [Isaiah 42:9]

God starts the chapter by drawing our attention to a very special person that He will send. He describes this person as:

…my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight... [Isaiah 42:1]

At least three of the names of Prophet Muhammad are mentioned - “servant”, “chosen one” and “in whom I delight”.

Isaiah was originally written in Hebrew. Arabic and Hebrew share a lot of common words because they are both Semitic languages. Isaiah uses the Hebrew word “ebed” for servant. The Arabic word for servant is “abd”. Prophet Muhammad is known as God’s Servant, in Arabic “abd - ullah”:

“Chosen one” is “Mustafa” in Arabic. This is another of the names of Prophet Muhammad.

The one in whom God ‘delights in’ shows that this person is beloved to God. ‘Habibullah’ in Arabic, which means “Beloved of God”, also happens to be one of Prophet Muhammad’s names.

The Location of this Special Person

In Isaiah God also reveals the location of this special person. He states:

Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. [Isaiah 42:11]

The two key words used are ‘Kedar’ and ‘Sela’ which together pinpoint an exact location for this special person. Out of all the places on earth that God inspired Isaiah to mention, He chose to highlight Kedar and Sela’s location so we should pay special attention.

Who is Kedar, and where did he settle? The Old Testament tells us that Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael:

These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam [Genesis 25:13]

Ishmael is one of the sons of the Prophet Abraham (pbuh). The Old Testament tells us that Ishmael dwelt in a place called Paran:

While he (Ishmael) was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt. [Genesis 21:21]

Many Christian interpreters of the Bible hold that Paran is in Arabia. From Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible:

He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran – This is generally allowed to have been a part of the desert belonging to Arabia Petraea, in the vicinity of Mount Sinai; and this seems to be its uniform meaning in the sacred writings.

Moreover Strong’s Bible Dictionary also tells us:

H6290 pâ’rân From H6286; ornamental; Paran, a desert of Arabia: – Paran.

We can also place the location of the descendants of Ishmael, known as Ishmaelites, to Arabia. According to Harper’s Bible Dictionary [1] the term ‘Ishmaelites’ is used synonymously with the term ‘Midianites’. We can see this from the story of Joseph in Genesis:

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard. [Genesis 37:36]

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. [Genesis 39:1]

So these two groups, the Midianites and Ishmaelites, are used interchangeably. We know that geographically, Biblical Midian is located in modern day Western Saudi Arabia, compare a typical Bible map with a modern day map:

exodusmap

Kedar and his own sons are also specifically linked to Arabia:

The oracle about Arabia. In the thickets of Arabia you must spend the night, O caravans of Dedanites. … all the splendor of Kedar will terminate. [Isaiah 21:13-16]

Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they did business with you. [Ezekiel 27:21]

The Old Testament scholar Charles Foster says about Kedar:

Namely, of the land of Kedar; which every reader conversant with Arabian geography will recognise as a most accurate delineation of the district of Hedjaz [Western Saudi Arabia], including its famous cities of Makkah and Madina. [2]

In summary we have established that Ishmael and his descendants, specifically Kedar, settled in modern day Saudi Arabia.

Whilst it’s true that Saudi Arabia represents a wide geographic region, the use of the word ‘Sela’ pinpoints an exact location. The place being spoken of is actually the city of Madinah because ‘Sela’ is the name of a famous mountain in Madinah. Madinah was the city of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

It is worth mentioning that Prophet Muhammad’s lineage can also be traced back to Prophet Abraham (peace be upon them all). This is through Kedar:

The Jewish Tribes of Madinah

An important point worth mentioning is that historically we know there was a presence of various Jewish tribes in Madinah before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Both Jewish Historians and Islamic history records this fact. The American historian Salo Baron, the most noted historian of the Jews of his generation, recorded the following in his book “Social and Religious History of the Jews”:

Judaic presence and influence throughout the region burgeoned steadily throughout the first few centuries of the Common Era. The process is substantiated by solidly sympathetic references to Jews and Judaism in pre-Islamic Arabic literature. By the sixth century, it is clear that Jewish tribes dominated Yathrib (Medina)… [3]

The question then arises, why were there numerous Jewish tribes within Madinah? The answer is that the learned Jews were aware of this prophecy in Isaiah and were anxiously awaiting the coming of a new prophet. Islamic history records the fact that whenever a dispute arose between the Jews and Arabs in Madinah, the Jews used to taunt their pagan Arab neighbours, by saying that:

when our prophet arrives we shall obliterate you…[4]

The Qur’an also affirms this. God says:

Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Children of Israel knew it (as true)? [Chapter 26, verse 197]

What this Special Person will bring?

In Isaiah, God informs us that this special person will bring something new. Mankind is told that we will:

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth… [Isaiah 42:10]

The statement “a new song” means a new law, a new way of worship. This is exactly what Islam represents. The emphasis on the new song here is singing the praise of God all over the earth. The Qur’an opens with the statement “Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds” and is recited by Muslims all over the world during prayers every day.

Some Christians believe that Isaiah is a prophecy about Jesus. When we analyse the life of Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament, we will see that this cannot be the case. The new song cannot refer to Jesus, because he did not bring about anything new, rather he confirmed the Law of Moses that was already there. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said:

Think not I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but fulfill... [Matthew 5:17-18]

Jesus obeyed and followed the Law of Moses throughout his life. Jesus didn’t sing a new song; he sang the same song of Moses, the Torah.

Moreover the disciples of Jesus also followed the Law of Moses, even after Jesus departed. In the Book of Acts we are told that the disciples looked to the Torah for guidance:

For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times... [Acts 15:21]

Who He will be sent to?

In Isaiah, God emphasises the universal mission of the coming person by mentioning that he will be made a:

...covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles [Isaiah 42:6]

Gentiles means non Jews. The Qur’an confirms that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent to the whole of mankind, Jews and Gentiles alike. In the Qur’an God tells us:

We have sent you [O Prophet] as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner for the whole of mankind, but most people have no knowledge. [Chapter 34, verse 28]

The verse in Isaiah cannot apply to Jesus because in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said:

I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. [Matthew 15:24]

In Isaiah, God further states that He will:

…lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them... [Isaiah 42:16]

The pagan Arabs at the time of Prophet Muhammad fit this description perfectly because they had not been sent a messenger prior to Muhammad. The Qur’an bears witness to this, God states that Muhammad was sent to:

...warn a people to whom no warner has come before... [Chapter 32, verse 3]

The verse in Isaiah cannot apply to Jesus because his people, the Israelites, had already received the Torah and a multitude of Prophets from God. Here are just some of the Prophets that the Israelites were sent, up to and including Jesus (pbuh):

Moses

Aaron

Joshua

Samuel

Nathan

David

Solomon

Micaiah

Hoshea

Amos

Micah

Elijah

Elisha

Jonah

Isaiah

Joel

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

Daniel

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

Jesus

In Isaiah, God emphasises that this special person will be sent to:

...those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’... [Isaiah 42:17]

The whole of Arabia at the start of Muhammad’s Prophethood consisted of idol worshippers.

Again, this cannot be a reference to Jesus because his people, the Israelites, were monotheists and not idol worshippers.

Moreover, Jesus explicitly told his disciples to stay away from the idol worshipping Gentiles, the exact opposite of what God prophesied in Isaiah. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles…” [Matthew 10:5]

A Warrior who will fight God’s Enemies

In Isaiah, God states that this special person will be a warrior and will:

...go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. [Isaiah 42:13]

Throughout history God has dealt sternly with those who are sent guidance and persist in disbelief. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had to engage in many battles with the idol worshipping enemies of God and ultimately prevailed against them.

By comparison, Jesus did not triumph over his enemies, according to Christians he was crucified by them. Moreover Jesus wasn’t interested in fighting, he was not a man of war, he was a pacifist according to the New Testament. He said such things as:

for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. [Matthew 26:52]

And:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight… [John 18:36]

What He will Achieve?

In Isaiah, God gives us a list of momentous achievements for this special person. Chief of these is that the idol worshippers:

...will be turned back in utter shame... [Isaiah 42:17]

Not only did Prophet Muhammad conquer Mecca, the Pagan capital of Arabia, but by the end of his life, in just 23 short years of Prophethood, Arabia had shunned idol worship and now worshipped the One true God of Abraham.

This cannot apply to Jesus as it was Christians themselves who were humiliated (and “greatly ashamed”) for hundreds of years after Jesus. They were persecuted at the hands of the Roman Empire who were idol worshippers. They executed some of the apostles of Jesus such as Peter and Paul. Christians were tortured and even fed to lions.

A Warning from God

Finally, Isaiah closes with an admonishment from God:

Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see…

You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen…

Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?” [Isaiah 42:18-23]

It seems clear that the “deaf and blind” God is talking about in this verse are those who reject Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Who among you will heed God by acknowledging him, who will “listen” and “pay close attention in time to come”?

Some Common Objections Answered

Some Christians might raise the objection that Muslims shouldn’t be using the Bible as evidence in support of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) because we also make the claim that the Bible is corrupted – in other words we can’t have it both ways.

The main proof of Muhammad’s Prophethood (pbuh) is and forever will be the miraculous Qur’an which was revealed by God to him through the angel Gabriel. God Almighty, out of His mercy for the Jews and Christians (respectfully referred to in the Qur’an as the People of the Book) also provided an additional proof to mankind of his Prophethood. As this booklet has demonstrated, this can be found in their very own Scriptures , such as the Book of Isaiah.

It must be noted that Muslims believe that many Prophets, such as Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them), were given Scripture by God. Whilst it’s true that not all of the Bible we have today is still the original word of God, the sheer number of different versions of the Bible in existence today is proof of this, Muslims have no doubt that Muhammad (pbuh) is mentioned in the Bible because God says in the Qur’an:

I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the poor due; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the Messenger (Muhammad) – the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel. [Chapter 7, verses 156-157]

Indeed one of the names of the Qur’an is “Al Furqan”, meaning the criterion between truth and falsehood, and as such the Qur’an represents the ultimate authority for truth. It is the most reliable religious Scripture in existence today thanks to its flawless preservation throughout history. Thanks to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that the Book of Isaiah is perhaps the most reliable book (in terms of textual preservation) in the entire Old Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of texts discovered between 1946 and 1956 inside caves near the Dead Sea in Jordan. The texts are of great religious significance because they include the earliest known surviving manuscripts of the Old Testament, dated to as early as 408 BCE [5]. Many manuscripts are fragmentary; however the Book of Isaiah can be found in its entirety and is virtually identical to what we have of the Book of Isaiah today so we can be confident in quoting from it [6].

So in summary, the Bible that we have today is unreliable as a whole, but the Book of Isaiah in particular is reliable. Readers are encouraged to reflect on why out of all the books of the Old Testament it is the Book of Isaiah, containing a very clear prophecy about Muhammad that has been preserved. Perhaps God intended for this to be a sign to mankind.

Conclusion

This booklet analysed in detail Isaiah 42, a chapter from a book of the Old Testament that clearly foretells the coming of Muhammad (pbuh). Many Christians and Jews have accepted Islam (Islam literally means ‘submission to God’) by recognising Muhammad (pbuh) from the Bible. One of those is the late Reverend David Benjamin Keldani, the author of ‘Muhammad in the Bible’ [7].

I must remind the Christians that unless they believe in the absolute unity of God, and renounce the belief in the three persons, they are certainly unbelievers in the true God ... The Old Testament and the Qur'an condemn the doctrine of three persons in God; the New Testament does not expressly hold or defend it, but even if it contains hints and traces concerning the Trinity, it is no authority at all, because it was neither seen nor written by Christ himself, nor in the language he spoke, nor did it exist in its present form and contents for – at least - the first two centuries after him. Rev. David Benjamin Keldani, B.D. (1867-1940)

Since it has clearly been shown that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is mentioned in the Bible, as a next step, we invite you to look into Islam by reading a translation of the Qur’an and learning more about Muhammad (pbuh). Many people are attached to their identity, and don’t want to look into another religion. But Islam is not just another religion; it’s the same core message of monotheism preached by Moses, Jesus and Abraham (peace be upon them). It is the final instalment of the same message sent by God over the centuries.

Guidance ultimately comes from God. We ask God to guide us and you. May God’s peace and blessing be upon you for the rest of your days.

References

1 - Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper’s Bible Dictionary, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985.

2 - Charles Foster, The historical geography of Arabia, P. 130.

3 - Salo Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews. Chapter XVI The Pre-Islamic World. Selections.

4 - Maxime Rodinson, Mohammed, (Pelican, London, 1973), p.143, quoting the Sira of Ibn Hisham.

5 - Greg Doudna, Dating the Scrolls on the Basis of Radiocarbon Analysis.

6 - See “The Great Isaiah Scroll” online here: http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah

7 - David Benjamin Keldani, Muhammad in World Scriptures.