

LECTURE 3: UNDERSTANDING, RESPONDING, SUBVERTING & FULFILLING MUHAMMAD

1 Some Thoughts from Day 1 and the Reading

- Last time: “just” a man, who received revelation, yet the best example and mediator, yet ahistorical, yet violence and sex
- What questions do you have about Muhammad?
- So, what do you think of Muhammad?
- From your homework and Senem Ekener, “Muhammad Case Study”, in Accad and Andrews, eds., *The Religious Other*, 284-5:
 - With whom do you most identify? Why?
 - What would you try to do in any conversation with them?
 - How do Christians you know talk about Muhammad (if at all)?
 - What if Muhammad never existed?

2 So, Who do You Say Muhammad Is?

- A prophet of sorts? Yes-ish, says Nestorian Patriarch Timothy (727-823) because Muhammad taught one God, good works, God’s Word and Spirit, and has a role in Muslim people’s understanding of God says Bill Musk¹
- False prophet? Yes, says Mark Gabriel and ?Salman Rushdie? because Muhammad was deceived and a deceiver (“Mahound”)
- A full-prophet in the Biblical sense? No, says Kenneth Cragg because of too much discontinuity²
- Mentioned in the Bible? [Is Muhammad mentioned in the Bible?\(Pack of 10\) | Word of Hope Ministries \(word-of-hope.net\)](#) / <https://www.word-of-hope.net/product/is-muhammad-mentioned-in-the-bible/> See also James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an*, (grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishing, 2013), ch9.
- Didn’t really exist? Jay and friends at Pfander <https://www.pfandercenter.org/>

¹ Bill Musk, *Kissing cousins – Christians and Muslims Face to Face* (Oxford: Monarch, 2005), 78-83.

² Musk, *Kissing Cousins*, note 28, 423.

- Key issues are “in these last days?” God has spoken finally and fully in and through His Son AND how do we understand truth outside of *our* book – see Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock is not as Our Rock: an evangelical theology of religions* (IVP, 2014)
- George Bristow, “The Seal of the Prophets: Reflections on John the Baptist and Muhammad”, in Accad and Andrews, eds., *The Religious Other*, 309:

“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 the Muslim worldview. Second, biblical prophethood or prophecy is inseparable from the overarching biblical narrative which reaches fulfilment with the coming of Jesus. Third, these two perspectives on prophethood are fundamentally incompatible.”

 - We must not reconstrue Muhammad’s prophethood “which forces him into a quasi-Christian category...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” with John the Baptist as the seal of the prophets who pointed to Jesus.³
 - Back to Samuel Green and the Bible’s contents’ page again...
- Look through the lens of the transfiguration (or its reversal) in Luke 9⁴
 - Jesus is greater than Moses (bringer of Law) and Elijah (law enforcer)
 - Jesus is God’s Son, his Chosen One, who must be listened to
 - BUT, Islam relativizes the prophets – Jesus is no different to Moses or Elijah
 - AND, Qur’an compares Muhammad to Moses⁵ and gives Muhammad the same role as Elijah
 - SO, Islam leaves us with a different Jesus and cuts out the gospel’s heart
 - THEREFORE, have an emphasis on law and a non-relational-Allah⁶ – a human development of Moses?

³ George Bristow, “The Seal of the Prophets: Reflections on John the Baptist and Muhammad”, in Accad and Andrews, eds., *The Religious Other*, 322.

⁴ This material is a summary of a seminar at St Helen’s Church, 31st January 2015, by Dr Ida Glaser, Oxford Centre for Muslim Christian Studies, <http://cmcsxford.org.uk/> and is in her book *Thinking Biblically about Islam*.

⁵ “The Qur’an’s portrayal of Muhammad’s prophethood is characterized by a typological association with the figure of Moses...The figure of Moses allowed Muhammad’s idea of theocracy to mature...the Qur’an views Muhammad as having completed Moses’ work. Consequently, it is in this sense that the expression “seal of the prophets” must primarily be understood.” Hartmut Bobzin, “The Seal of the Prophets: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood” in Angelika Neuwirth et al *The Qur’an in Context*, pp565-583.

⁶ See more from Ida in her contribution “Where is the Shekinah, the Presence of God with his people?” in Accad and Andrews eds, *The Religious Other*, 106-108.

3 So, How do You Respond to: “What do you think of Muhammad”?

- Just someone else famous and influential in history?
- Study Muhammad alongside Jesus?⁷ Eg:
 - Surah 46:9: “Say: ‘I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration: I am but a warner open and clear.’”
 - Surah 40:55 and 47:19: “...and ask forgiveness for thy fault...”
 - Surah 6:50: “Say: ‘I will tell you not that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden, nor do I tell you I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me.’”
 - No titles of honour, but 23 for Isa al Masih, so look at them and go to the NT
 - Power, *Understanding Jesus and Muhammad*: compare prophecies about Muhammad and Jesus, sinlessness of Muhammad and Jesus, miracles, violence and peace, response to women, death, the end of the age...
- Hand them a flyer...
- A man made in God’s image and fallen...
- Subvert and fulfil: enter the world (listen), explore (find grace and idols), expose (show idols’ emptiness) and evangelise (Jesus as subversive fulfilment)⁸
 - subvert and fulfil #1: “the position is filled”⁹
 - subvert and fulfil #2: “there is no peace for or from the wicked”
 - subvert and fulfil x3: “there is no rock”¹⁰

4 A conclusion from a MBU using one of the refugees to Abyssinia...

"It's clear to both Muslims and Christians that there is only one God. But it wasn't always so."

⁷ David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam – how God is drawing Muslims around the world to faith in Jesus Christ*. (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2014), 76, Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* and Bernie Power, *Understanding Jesus and Muhammad – what the ancient texts say about them*, (Moreland, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2016).

⁸ See Daniel Strange, *Plugged In*, (London: The Good Book Company, 2019), especially pages 117-139.

⁹ See also James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*, on comparing Jesus' and Muhammad's intercession, 121-126.

¹⁰ See Robert Scott, *Sharing the Gospel with a Muslim Neighbour*, (Leyland: 10Publishing, forthcoming 2021), chapter 6.

The Bible is clear that even shortly after creation, men followed created things. They cried out for help from things which weren't gods at all. Indeed, we read that Abraham himself was called out of such idolatry, out of a chaotic, polytheistic culture, by the one true Almighty God (see Joshua 24:2, Isaiah 41:8).

But to Abraham and his many, many descendants, the pull was always to worship the gods of other nations, Baal, Ashtoreth or whoever else. Repeatedly God's special people had to be reminded of monotheism, that there was one true God. There was no other God like their God, Yahweh, the LORD, their Rock and their Redeemer.

They needed to know that He was mightier than the mightiest. And so, the LORD defeated Pharaoh, the supreme ruler of the ancient world and put his false gods to flight. Because the LORD alone is God, there is no other.

But even as the LORD did so, He revealed Himself to be more complex than his people realised. He could walk with his people in the Garden of Eden, be grieved by the sin of Noah's day, come down to deal with the rebellion of Babel, appear to and eat with Abraham, wrestle with Jacob, speak with Moses in a burning bush, appear on Mt Sinai, fill a tent and a temple, appear to Solomon, dwell in the high and holy place and with the humble, and leave Jerusalem (in Genesis 3:8, 6:6, 11:7, 17:1-22, 18:1-21, 32:22-32; Exodus 3, 24, 34, 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:1-11, 3:3-15, 9:1-9; Isaiah 57:15; Ezekiel 1). And, as the LORD challenged his people not to be polytheists, so He also taught them that His Spirit was active, as was His Word (such as in Genesis 1:1-3 and Psalm 33:6). That each had life-giving power and authority, and were part of the one true God.

So, when the final revelation of God came, in the person of the Word becoming flesh, Jesus the Messiah (in John 1:1-18), it was clear to His followers that true Biblical monotheism involved 3 persons, perfectly united, and this didn't mean they were following three gods. It was also in keeping with the God of the previous Scriptures and Prophets, who was able to enter space and time, and reveal himself and relate to his creation.

But such a clear and final revelation came after centuries of progressive prophetic writings, which gave clues to the mystery, not the full answer. Prophetic writings which were written to guard God's people against polytheism, but when they were ready to realise that God's persons did not mean polytheism, the Word became flesh.

Fast forward to 7th Century Arabia. Polytheism abounds. It's like Abraham's day. People need to realise there's only one God. Which is the message Muhammad preached.

To his ears any talk of Trinity or incarnation sounded like polytheism, because he hadn't had centuries of preparation for it, unlike the Jewish believers, who became the first church. And so he stuck with a strict, monad, unitarian god, which did not fit with the Old or New Testament scriptures.

But that wasn't true for all Muhammad's followers. Having come to realise that polytheism was illogical and chaotic, and seeking to follow one God, some of them were ready to hear about the one true God who is three persons. One of them was called Ubaidullah.

In one of the earliest accounts of Muhammad's life and times, by ibn Ishaq, we read (on p99) that Ubaidullah "went on searching [for truth] until Islam came; then he migrated with the Muslims to Abyssinia [due to persecution in Mecca] taking with him his wife who was a Muslim.

When he arrived there, he adopted Christianity, parted from Islam, and died a Christian in Abyssinia. [And] Ubaidullah as he passed the prophet's companions who were there used to say: 'We see clearly, but your eyes are only half open,' that is, 'We see, but you are only trying to see and cannot see yet.'" And the word used for "eyes half open" is the same as for when a puppy tries to open its eyes, a kind of blinking that sees shapes but not much more.

Ubaidullah had his eyes opened to see the truth about God, and his own sorry state before him. My prayer is that all of us would be like him. That the LORD who is both light and love, our Rock and our Redeemer would open all of our eyes, out of his bounteous mercy and wonderful love, and we would walk into his loving light."