An Excellent Pattern have Ye: Moses & the Jews as the Qur'an's Models of Prophethood and Community

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"But before it was the Book of Moses,
a model and a mercy" – Qur'an 46:12

Of the many Prophets of the Bible mentioned in the Qur'an, Moses—by far—receives the most attention. In uncovering the complex relationship between Islam and Judaism as presented in the Qur'an, a worthy beginning to such investigations is unpacking the reasons why this might be. This unpacking, I assert, should be given at least as much attention as the Qur'anic polemics against the Jews contemporary to Muhammad, scolding them for their perceived disobedience to God and for rebelling against the Medina Constitution.[1] It may be hypothesized that Moses and the Jews receive so much attention because they are the only other religious community near Muhammad. However, according to scholars who date when specific parts of the Qur'an were revealed, of the thirty chapters that deal with Moses or the Jews, only two were revealed in Medina,[2] wherein Muhammad closely engaged Jewish communities. Focusing on these two chapters to understand Islam-Judaism relations then becomes problematic, as these surahs proceed out of context of conflict and resentment between Muhammad's growing leadership in Yathrib/Medina and certain Jewish tribes. as the roots of the conflicts between Jews and Muslims.[3] Much of the scholarship centers upon this context as the birth of ongoing conflict between Jews and Muslims, although other scholarship focuses on the Jewish influence on Islamic teachings and practice.[4]

The other twenty-eight of the thirty chapters that deal with Moses and/or the Jews were revealed in Mecca, where Muhammad's primary audiences were Arab polytheists,

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[1] Soon after emigrating to Medina as a tribal mediator, Muhammad is believed to have composed this treaty, covenanting that each tribal group not only orders itself but does not do anything to compromise the safety of other tribes in that city.
[2] Alan Jones, in J.M. Rodwell, *The Koran* (London: J.M. Dent, 1994), xx.
[3] Roald L Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki, ed., *Muslim-Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics* (India: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 19-21.
[4] Barakat Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews: a Re-Examination* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, 1979), 4.

not Jews or Christians.[5] Thus, the context of most of the Qur'anic occupations with Moses and the Israelites are not directly polemical against the tribes of Arab Jews. We find that Moses is by far the most spoken of prophetic figure in the Qur'anic revelations. From name searches in an online Qur'an database, I counted that "Moses" is explicitly named in over 165 verses, and 30 of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an: that is over a fourth of the *surah*s. For comparison, we find that "Abraham" is a distant second, named in 69 verses and 25 chapters; "Noah" in 43 verses found in 28 chapters, "Joseph" in 36 verses of three chapters (although the entire chapter 12 narrates his story); while "Jesus" appears in 28 verses and 12 chapters. "Adam" is sixth place with 25 verses. "Moses," thus, is named more often than Abraham, Noah, Joseph, and Jesus combined![6] The major focus of nine of those thirty chapters of the Qur'an is a telling of the Exodus narrative in its own way. But what accounts for this almost obsessive concern with the story of Moses?

For comedians to be funny they need to know their crowd. For a Prophet to be significant he also needs to know the cultural background of what will make sense to whom he is talking. Preaching in Mecca, Muhammad found himself with a unique challenge. The Arab Meccans had heard of monotheism and some may have nominally accepted that one God was higher than the others, but they found their polytheism more useful and customary. Through their interactions as merchants with some Jewish and Christians, the Meccans had heard of many of the prophets in the Bible (and probably

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[5] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 27; on chronological order of the surahs, see Kevin P. Edgecomb, "Chronological Order of Quranic Surahs," Bombaxo, last modified September 23, 2010, accessed April 23, 2018, http://www.bombaxo.com/chronsurs.html. Edgecomb summarizes the chronology work of German orientalist Theodor Noldeke who in turn bases most of his chronology off the scholarship of Abu al-Qasim `Umar ibn Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Kafi.

[6] I acknowledge that this is a somewhat imprecise method to arrive at exact numbers of how many verses talk about each Prophet, since some verses may refer to a Prophet implicitly or by pronouns instead of by name. Nonetheless, through reading closely although without having to survey the entirety of the Qur'an, I found this method of mention-by-name gives a fair approximation of attention given to individual Prophets.

Sabian and Zoroastrian traditions as well).[7] For these illustrious figures of legend, such as Abraham, Noah, Moses, Isaac, and David they shared the Hebrew word for prophet with the Jews—*nabī* (plural forms: *nabiyyūn* and *anbiyā'* in Arabic and *nabiyyīm* and *nabiyyī* in Hebrew).[8] Therefore, when Muhammad talked about these prophets, his detractors were familiar enough with these names as to accuse him of being one who just recounts 'tales of the ancients.'[9] (Qur'an 26:137)

Arabs have contained in their folklore the belief that they were descended from Abraham through his son Ishmael. Additionally, the Qur'an seems to draw on other folklore about prophetic figures—not mentioned in the Bible—who appeared to the Arabians. According to the classical Qur'anic commentators, pre-Islamic traditions have oral histories about Hūd's mission to the 'Ad tribe south of Mecca on the border of Yemen and Oman, and Ṣāliḥ appearing to the Thamūd tribe somewhere between Medina and Syria.[10] However, these distant figures were just stories of mythic pasts and other peoples. In their minds, such exceptional individuals *did not really* appear in real life on this earth. As far as we can tell, most Meccans were not expecting or looking for a Prophet to appear among themselves, and—at-least to Muhammad—neither would they know it if one did appear.

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[7] Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 4 & 9.

[8] Arthur Jeffrey in *The Qur'an as Scripture* has argued that *nabī* is a borrowing into Arabic from Judaism. However, Bijlefeld counters that this is not so clear as there are a number of verbs with the same roots as the noun *nabī* that are used frequently in the Qur'an. W. A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More than a Prophet: Some observations on the Qur'anic use of the terms "prophet" and "apostle", in *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, Colin Turner, ed. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, vol. II Themes and Doctrines, 2004), 300 & 314.

[9] "*khuluqu āl-awalīn*" or more commonly "*asāṭīru āl-awalīn*. Also in: Qur'an 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17

[10] Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur'an: An Introduction to the Qur'an and Muslim Exegesis*, (London: Continuum, 2002), 65 & 76. The Qur'an speaks of Hud and Salih in a number of chapters, such as 7, 11, & 26. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an, 2nd ed.* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamic, 1989), 82. Unlike the Jewish prophets, Salih is not called a *nabī* but a *mursāl* (messenger) in 7:75, while in 7:67 Hūd calls himself a messenger in the more popular word of *rasūl*.

What characteristics would constitute a prophet? Arabs considered anyone gifted or distinguished in telling the future or interpreting dreams to be a *kāhin*, a poet to be a *shā'ir*, or a magician to be a *sāḥir*. If someone also or otherwise had natural leadership abilities then his clan or tribe might make him a *shaykh* or chief.[11] Muhammad's challenge, thus, was to cultivate the category of "prophet" or "messenger," the stuff of Arab folklore, to be a living, on earth reality, of past and present. From what the Qur'an gives us, the prophetic prototype that was drawn upon with the most depth and consistency to communicate the dynamic of prophethood to which Muhammad was heir, was none other than Moses. In this way the Qur'an distinguishes Muhammad from the normative categories of his people's society—soothsayer, magician, and/or poet—to communicate the nature of his own station and mission, and indicate to his hearers the challenges to and opportunities of properly responding to his message.[12]

Communicating the conceptual framework for his own station as Messenger was not the only challenge for Muhammad. He was also confronted with the task of communicating an ideal of unity, based on the bonds of a common religious commitment. The major population of Mecca consisted of various clans of the tribe of Quraysh (and

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[11] *Kāhin* is a soothsayer or ecstatic poet in pre-Islamic Arabia, and *sāhir* and *mashūr* were magician, sorcerers, or wizards. Both of these types of individuals were understood to receive their inspirations and power from the Jinn (spirit-beings, good or bad like humans, but usually invisible), perhaps by being possessed. *Shā'ir* is a poet who would create and recite rhyming ballads of the historical exploits of his own clan or tribe. And a *shaykh* was the leader of the tribe or clan, also called *sayyid*. Reza Aslan, *No god but God* (New York: Random House, 2006), 7-8, 29-30, 37-38, 269, 271; W. Montgomery Watt *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 127; Helmet Gatje *The Qur'an and its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. and ed. Alford T. Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 3 & 9; Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an, 2nd ed.* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamic, 1989), 94-95. That Muhammad's position was thought of in these ways is attested by the many verses in the Qur'an in which Muhammad specifically has to address each of these notions and refute them.

[12] Secular scholars call the Qur'an the speech of Muhammad, Muslims call it the speech of God. Here, out of pragmatics of respect to both parties, I will assert it to be either, but call the Qur'an's contents its own contents, and say the Qur'an is the speech considered by Muslims to be God's revelation recited through Muhammad. This gives us the flexibility to call it either from God or from Muhammad without having to choose sides, theologically.

perhaps a few other tribes of kinship with the Quraysh), and human solidarity was based on a common ancestry and close kinship networks. The value of filial-loyalty to the clan, and secondly to the tribe, was supreme. An individual walked his life with long genealogies in his head that traced his proud ancestry back to an illustrious figure, and he knew exactly how he was related to the hundred or hundreds of members of his own clan. Religious rites were performed at the Kaaba because that was what the clan did—informing the cohesiveness of the group, but not defining it. Non-related individuals could become associated with the clan or tribe by becoming a *halīf* (ally), *mawāli* (client), or being a bought or captured *qinn* (slave). Meanwhile, tribes made agreements with other tribes for safe passage of their caravanned goods.[13]

In this environment Muhammad struggled to inculcate a sense of unity and fellow solidarity based on mutual religious commitments that transcended, superseded, and over-rode kinship bonds—a community (*ummah*) united by reverence for monotheism, scripture, God's Prophet. The word *ummah* was first used to denote 'religious community' during the middle of Muhammad's time in Mecca (as a Prophet). It was then strongly stressed in the Qur'an verses of the last Meccan period and continued to be so throughout the Medinan period of revelations.[14]

The major emphasis of the first Qur'anic sermons was personal accountability. If we take—as Muslims do—Qur'anic Islam as a single ideal, which God progressively revealed through Muhammad over that twenty-three-year period, then we can conclude

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[13] This could be *'ilaf* or *hilf*, or *jiwar*. Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Brothers, 1989), 19-29.
[14] Frederick Denny, "Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qur'an," *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Colin Turner (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 28.

that individual accountability was a prerequisite concept to forming a religiously based *ummah*. Surah 74, frequently believed to be among the first revealed, says in part:

> O you (Muhammad), wrapt in your cloak! Arise and warn! And glorify your Lord!... For when the Trumpet is blown, that day will be a Day of Distress, Not of ease, for disbelievers. Leave Me with him whom I created alone… him shall I fling into the burning-hell…scorching the flesh… Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds. Save those who will stand on the right hand. In Gardens they will ask concerning the evil-doers: What caused you to enter this burning-hell? They shall say, 'We were not of those who prayed, and we did not feed the needy. And we immersed ourselves indulgently sinning and talking vanities together. And we denied the Day of Judgement, until the Certain came upon us.' The intercession of the interceders will not help them. What is the matter with them that they run from [this] Reminder? As frightened donkeys fleeing from a lion… Nay, this is an Admonition. Whoever wills, take heed.

Members of tribes and clans needed to become conscientious individuals standing before God in which no one is responsible for the good or wrong that one does but one self. Once becoming a self-responsible individual, they could then become a collective, collaborative identity committed to living by the will of God (Muslims), as expressed by God in the Qur'an through Muhammad.

The Qur'an progressively develops an understanding of *ummah* in a way that would eventually apply to an ideal of a 'fellowship of believers.' While the pre-Islamic etymology and usage of the word is ambiguous, around the Arabian Peninsula it seemed—at-least sometimes—to denote 'religious community.'[15] This is Muhammad's starting point with which he used it to designate a people who receives a Messenger: a people who accepts a Messenger (such as the Jews and Christians), or who together accept a religious creed, rite, or book.

Interestingly, from how he uses the word, it seems Muhammad did *not* want to create a severe delineation between those who accepted His own Prophet-hood (Muslims) and that of other monotheists (Jews, Christians, and *hānif*s). Rather, at-least at first, he saw all monotheistic 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitāb*) as fellow 'believers' (*mu'minīn*).

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[15] Denny, "Meaning of *Ummah* in the Qur'an," (2004), 22.

Any distinctions he made between his own followers and other monotheists were quite fluid. The discourse and leadership of Muhammad suggests he desired that these identities be tied together in a stronger collective identity of those who worship the one God through common types of moral/ethical ideals, laws, good deeds, and rites, and who protect each other in a common body politic.[16]

From this usage, instead of denoting *ummah* as a circle with one definite boundary, a more useful model would be to see it as a system of concentric circles radiating in proximity to the Islamic ideal, with permeable boundaries. Muhammad and his fellow emigrants (*muhājirūn*) from Mecca represented the inner circle, converts in Medina (called *ansār* – helpers/supporters) stood in the second circle, fellow monotheists like the Jewish tribes (*yahūd*) are in the third, and pagan participants in the Medinan pact are put in the fourth and outer.[17] Nonetheless, those of outer circles had potential to enter the inner circle in fully embracing Muhammad's message. However, after some bitter polemics between the Jews and Muhammad about his prophetic claims, and when several Jewish tribes betrayed the Medina pact and helped the Meccans instead, the boundary between Muslims and other monotheists became much more severe. Quranic revelations eventually had Muhammad stop struggling to bring a Jewish people to his side who did

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[16] For example, in the Medina Constitution he calls the Jewish and pagan members of the pact as part of the "ummah." Also, 2:62 an early Medinan *surah*, says: "Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve."

[17] Mozaffari agrees with this basic approach of these different constituent members of the total community and concentric circles for degrees of authority as Muslims, but as his concern is with political and state power, his organization is different. See Mehdi Mozaffari, "Authority in Islam: from Muhammad to Khomeini," *The International Journal of Politics* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., Winter 1986-1987), 24-29). The implications of this approach is that "believer" or "infidel" among Muslims is an over-simplistic approach; rather human beings live along a continuum of varying degree of belief and dedication, or lack-thereof, to the will of God. Such a theology finds expression in Farid Esack, *Qur'an, liberation & pluralism: an Islamic perspective of interreligious solidarity against oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

not want to be integrated, and Muhammad received a revelation to move the qiblah [direction of prayer] from Jerusalem to the Kaaba, which further distinguished the two groups.[18] Of this new, reified religious community, the Qur'an speaks of in one of the last revealed surahs: "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam." (Qur'an 5:3)

Earle H. Waugh offered a "model approach" to understanding the biographies of Muhammad as sacred history.[19] He draws on various scholars' ideas about models to elaborate this notion. It is what Charles F. Hocket calls an "archetypal frame of reference." And he draws upon Max Black's definition of "archetype" in *Models and Metaphors*: "a systematic repertoire of ideas by means of which a given thinker describes by analogical extension, some domain to which those ideas do not immediately and literally apply." Building on the work of Ian Ramsey, he says, "Models are not just imaginary perceptions brought to bear upon unsuspecting data, but insights into the true nature of things which, though they may appear to contradict what is normally held to be true, say something meaningful about the reality from which they arise."[20]

Drawing upon Waugh's theory of Muhammad as a "model" of the highest values of his people, I am arguing that for most of his mission Muhammad's concern with Moses and the Exodus was not to rebuke the local Jewish tribes for not following much of Mosaic Law nor for not recognizing the Prophet-hood of Muhammad. Rather, Moses and the Exodus served as "models" in which Muhammad weaved a web of inter-related

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[18] *W.* A. Bijlefeld (2004), 130-131. Qur'an 2:144 says in part: "We will surely turn you to a qiblah with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-haram."

[19] Waugh asserts that a model is distinguished from a pattern as the shape given to the structure in a model is not monovalent. However, so fine of a distinction does not concern us here, and I use synonymously model, pattern, didactic symbol, and reference point. See Earle H. Waugh, "The popular Muhammad: models in the interpretation of an Islamic paradigm," *Approaches to Islam in religious studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 43-45.

[20] Earle H. Waugh (1985), 43-45.

significances that he decided could best highlight the nature of his own mission, the message that he wanted to communicate, his relationship with those who chose to follow him, their relationship with God, and the basis of his followers relationship with each other.[21] Muhammad decided that Moses and the Jewish community he founded, better than any other symbols familiar in the memory of the people around him, could represent an "archetypal frame of reference"[22] that exemplified his own prophetic mission.[23] Furthermore, I argue that Muhammad saw the Israelites as both positive and negative schemata, and that his own followers should learn from both their triumphs and their mistakes. In other words, far from striving to set a precedent for Jewish hatred, Muhammad saw his own emergent community as nearly identical in attributes and possibilities to the ancient Jewish community whose story he recounted. Likewise, the "children of Israel" contemporaries—with whom Muhammad debated—had similar potential.

Models are explicative and pedagogical. Waugh argues that the Prophet-image of Muhammad became a locus, or model, for Muslims highest values generations after he

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[21] One of the early academy's exploration of the significance of Moses in the Qur'an was by C. Umhau Wolf. He said, "Moses is significant in the New Testament and church fathers because his life and character are a means of understanding Jesus better. In Islam such a parallel is not vital although it is present." C. Umhau Wolf, "Moses in Christian and Islamic Tradition," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 27, no. 2 (April 1959): 102-108. I am obviously mitigating significantly Wolf's assessment and asserting instead that Moses is very saliently stressed as a model to understand Muhammad's own mission and position.

[22] Earle H. Waugh, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, 44, quoting Charles Francis Hockett, "Two Models of Grammatical Description," *Word* 10, no. 2 (March 1954): 210.

[23] Please note, although the terms are not interchangeable, for my purposes here I am justified in using "Prophet" to denote both *rasūl* and *nabī*. I will also use "Prophet," and "Messenger" interchangeably. Those who look at the relationship between *rasūl* and *nabī* often note that not every *nabī* is a *rasūl*, but every *rasūl* is also a *nabī*. Because both Muhammad and Moses are considered in the Qur'an as both these terms, these two concepts become fused together—at-least when referring to a *rasūl*. Moses being a didactic "model" for both, we need not here concern ourselves with when Moses is a model of a *nabī* and when he is a model of a *rasūl*. However, in some other contexts than how Muhammad referred to Moses to exemplify his own mission, these distinction can be important between the two terms. For an excellent article on these two terms see, W. A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More than a Prophet: Some observations on the Qur'anic use of the terms "prophet" and "apostle", in *The Qur'an: Style and Contents*, ed. Andrew Rippen, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 131-158.

lived.[24] I am arguing: to become the Prophet in the first place, Muhammad drew upon the figure of Moses for the people around him to conceive of the distinguishing characteristics of Prophet-hood through a person of legend. That conception could then be transposed—or better envisioned—in Muhammad so as to override the 'everyday-ness' of his human limitations, and to override the confusion proceeding from similarities in the nature of his work with that of other categories of aptitudes in Arab culture. In other words, the Qur'an presented and framed this popular narrative as an effective didactic symbol to communicate the nature of Muhammad's station and the demands and possibilities of the evolving community of recipients of his message.

I should note here that an approach to the Prophets of the Qur'an as models, patterns, or guides is not Earle H. Waugh's unique innovation. Rather, the Qur'an itself uses the language of the Prophets as a 'model' unto the people explicitly in relation to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Muhammad himself is called a beautiful exemplar.[25] About Moses and his Book the Qur'an says: "But before it was the Book of Moses, a model [*imāman*] and a mercy."[26]

From close readings of the chapters in the Qur'an that deal heavily with Moses or the Exodus narrative, comparing those with their corollary in the Hebrew Bible, and paying close attention to the choices he made in what to emphasize of that story and how to frame it, I wish to discern and explicate in this essay many of the salient ideas in the repertoire of significances that the Qur'anic recitations strive to draw out of the Exodus

[24] Waugh (1985), 46, 52
[25] Qur'an 16:120, 21:73, 33:21. In these verses the words *ummah*, *a'immah*, and *uswatun* are employed.
[26] Qur'an 46:12; also see 11:17.

archetypes of prophethood and religious-community.[27] I will mainly rely on my own close reading of the relevant verses. However, I will also weave in some of the insights eminent Muslim and non-Muslim Qur'an commentators in Europe & America, and what we can take from them on how Moses-Exodus served as the Prophetic-Ummah model.

According to Qur'an-scholar and activist Farid Esack, if the parallels between Abraham and Muhammad were somewhat subtle, "no such subtleties" exist in the case of Muhammad and Moses."[28] Both are orphans who are adopted. They both see an angel in a wilderness who is God's intermediary and who commissions them to transmit a message from Him. They both are accused of being a magician/sorcerer (26:34 & 38:4), a soothsayer [*kāhin*[29]], a madman (majnūn) (26:6 & 16:6), or harboring ambitions of political power.[30] Both men oppose the political rulers and the wealthy members of society—for their exploitative economic practices—who are also their chief persecutors. Both lead their people out of the land of oppression in the Exodus or the Hijra. Finally, each become religious, political, and military heads of a large body of people.[31]

Through the verse brushstrokes of the Qur'an, Moses is painted as the Prophet of the Absolute God—universal Lord of all existence. God communicates Himself to the Prophet via angels, fire, and smoke. God empowers the Prophets with "Clear Signs"—

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[27] Meanwhile, we will leave aside questions of which account is more 'historical.' For a thoughtful inquiry into questions of historicity, written by two Muslim apologists, see Louay Fatoohi and Shetha Al-Dargazelli, *The Mystery of Israel in Ancient Egypt* (Birmingham, England: Luna Plena Publishing, 2008).
[28] Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: a user's guide: a guide to its key themes, history and interpretation* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2005), 154.
[29] "soothsayer [*kāhin*]" I include following Esack's own inclusion as a parallel, although I cannot seem to find the verse he bases this on. One of the verses in which Muhammad is cited as being referred to in this way is Qur'an 52:29.
[30] About Moses this appears in Qur'an 10:78. On Muhammad, according to his early Muslim biographers, his opponents assumed he was seeking political power and financial wealth and offered him such if he would desist from his prophetic claims. W.M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 122-123, 130.
[31] Additionally, both end up slaughtering traitors [unfortunately, in both cases – Jews!].

inimitable miracles and axiomatic pronouncements—from which people can recognize their divinely-conferred authority. Messengers are endowed with unique communications where they do not speak from themselves, but transmit God's message, which altogether represents a Book. They warn the people of punishments if they do not obey, and they bring glad-tidings of the blessings of those who turns faithfully towards God. They call the people to a serious purpose in life, transcending material comforts and social prestige, for which they are accountable before God and for which they will be judged.

According to the Qur'an the masses *kathaba*—deny that which deep down they know to be true. The leaders outwardly deny the Message and accuse the Prophet of unseemly abilities and motives. The Messenger challenges the whole social order and upholds the cause of the oppressed—the enslaved, the exploited, women, and children. He founds a new community united by its commitment to the one God, His ethics and laws, in a mutual Covenant that assures blessings and prosperity. The Prophet warns, educating the people and giving them multiple chances to turn to the higher voice of truth. And even though most powerful institutions of society and the traditional structures and practices oppose the Messenger and his people, God promises that their opponents are eventually punished and His chosen ones are ultimately triumphant.

Muhammad uses the story of Moses to redefine Prophet-hood in relation to Godhood. The Kaaba was partly so invaluable as an economic center where tribes would come for worship because it contained the gods of each of these peoples. Instead of regional gods, and human products, the Islamic revelation shows Messenger-ship is in relation to the one God who creates all existence and rules all people. The Qur'an

represents the story of Moses' prophet-hood—not as the "Lord God of Israel" (Exodus 5:1)—but in the light of the "I am"-hood of Yahweh (Ex. 3:14): "Moses said: "O Pharaoh! I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds."" (Q. 7:104) Likewise, one of the most oft-repeated designations for this same God that Muhammad asserts to speak for, as in the first chapter of the Qur'an (called 'The Opening') is the "Lord of the worlds" [*Rabb al-a'alamīn*]. (1:2) This Being that the Prophet represents is different from the idols that are an object and tool of one's own fancies and diversions, in that it is He Who commands His creation (Q. 13:31), rather than vise-versa. Moses drives home the point of the difference between traditional idols and the supreme God after some of his people are tempted into making and worshiping the golden calf. He reprimands them saying, "What! shall I seek for you a god other than Allah while He has made you excel (all) created things?" (Q. 7:140) Although it gives a lowing sound, it cannot even talk or guide them (Q.7:148). In other words, the human being is not made to worship that which is below or equal to itself.[32]

The modes of revelation unto the Prophet have been delineated in commentaries (*tafsīr*) to be according to verse 42:51 of the Qur'an: "It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration [*waḥī*], or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills." Sometimes it is angels that transmit the inspiration of God's command (16:2). Elsewhere it says that God communicates to the Prophet through visions, as in the case of Abraham (37:102), or through the Holy Spirit [*rūhu'l-quds*] in the case of Jesus (5:110) and Muhammad

[32] The human difficulty in worshipping that which is overwhelmingly transcendent, and so a person's continual returning movement to simpler forms, is emphasized in Qur'an verse 4:153: "The people of the Book ask thee to cause a book to descend to them from heaven: Indeed, they asked Moses for an even greater (miracle), for they said: "Show us Allah in public," but they were dazed for their presumption, with thunder and lightning. Yet they worshipped the calf even after clear signs had come to them."

(16:102). For Moses, the Qur'an says that God spoke directly (4:164; 7:141), or through a bush or tree (28:30), or through fire (27:9), or by an inspiration (20:77). Farid Esack tells us that most Qur'anic commentators have decided that altogether this means that God communicates Himself to the Prophet Moses directly, yet through a veil.[33] This is embodied in the verses 20:11-13 of the Qur'an:

> But when he came to the fire, a voice was heard: "O Moses! Verily I am thy Lord! Therefore (in My presence) put off thy shoes: thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa. I have chosen thee: listen, then, to the inspiration [*yūḥāā*] (sent to thee)."

The Bible presents this "valley" to be a mountain called Horeb in which God spoke to Moses through in "angel of the Lord" in the bush on fire. According to the traditional telling, Muhammad also received his first revelation on a mountainside (outside Mecca) in the wilderness while in a cave in which he burned a fire and an angel came to him.

Thus, through compelling narrative form, the recitations via Muhammad communicate the diverse ways the Prophet gets his message from God. It is interesting to note that unlike the Book of Exodus in the Bible that says, "and the angel of the Lord appeared unto [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush," in the Qur'anic version no angel is mentioned. These stories of Moses and the burning bush were revealed during the Meccan period, when also there was no mention of any angel such as Gabriel being the transmitter to Muhammad (or to any other Prophet) of the revelation. Rather for Muhammad the first revelations came to him as waking visions that M.W. Watt describes as nonverbal thoughts arising deep within Muhammad's inner being.[34] Nonetheless, whether we rely on tellings of angelic visitations in the Bible and in popular biographies of Muhammad, or the Qur'an and oldest Islamic traditions speaking of

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[33] Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction, Oxford: Oneworld Publications*, 42.
[34] All the verses about Gabriel are considered to not have been revealed until Medina. W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 40-59.

thoughts of Moses and Muhammad being inspired, we can say that the two Prophets are offered as receiving revelation in similar terms.

To demonstrate his communication with the Lord of the worlds, God empowers the Messenger with "Clear Signs" – inimitable miracles and axiomatic pronouncements – from which people can recognize their divinely-conferred authority. God conferred upon Moses an abundance of miracles—a snake-staff, a hand that became snow-white after he put it in his bosom, (Qur'an 27:10-12) and seven (or more) plagues (Q. 7:130-133; 17:101). However, the sense we get from the Qur'an's telling is that—although Pharaoh's magicians recognized the superior nature of Moses' miracles and humbled themselves before him—the miracles had no pervasive effect in convincing those who had no predisposition to believe, such as Pharaoh, his ministers, and the majority of Israelites who feared Pharaoh's wrath.

Whatever proofs and miracles they do, it is the miracle of pronouncements that resonate as inherently truthful, which is the proof common to all Prophets. In other words, the Quran asserts that it is the Prophet's message itself that is self-evident proof of the truth of it being from God, for the message itself is self-evident truth. About Moses' message the Qur'an says: "God verifies the truth by His words, though sinners be averse.'" (10:82) This verse comes right after the contest of staff-snakes between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians. Similarly, in 8:7 the Qur'an says, "And Allah willed that He should cause the Truth to triumph by His words." Even more interesting is what we find in 34:43: "And if Our revelations are recited unto them in plain terms, they say: This is naught else than a man who would turn you away from what your fathers used to worship; …Those who disbelieve say of the truth when it reacheth them: This is naught

else but clearly magic [*siḥr mubīn*]." Furthermore, in chapter ten especially, the Qur'an even sets up the showdown between Moses and the magicians as something like we imagine the contest to have been when the Meccans challenged Muhammad's assertion to his proof being his special 'recitations.' Whether the Prophets make magical snakes or oral discourses of truth, the Qur'an wants us to know that the results were the same. His "sign" "straightway swallows up all the falsehoods which they fake!"[35] (26:45)

Thus, more than supernatural acts, the Messenger primarily is characterized by just that—carrying a message. This is often called their "Book" (*kitāb*) – whether referring to a finished codex, the progressive recitations, or that Mother Book eternally with God and from which those other two proceed.[36] Throughout his mission Muhammad urged his followers and others to accept the Torah and Evangel as revelations from God. These revelations distinguish truth from error, and righteousness from heedlessness, as the Criterion [*furqān*] (Q. 21:48), and "guidance" (23:49). When accused of just being common magicians, Moses & Aaron recite this verse: "Say: Then bring some (other) book from Allah which is a better guide than both of them, (that) I may follow it, if you are truthful." (28:49) The Qur'an is asserting its self-evident value as the supreme guidance for living. And this verse is reminiscent of Muhammad's supreme proof of the inimitability [*i'jāz*] of the Qur'anic verses [*ayāt*] and *surah*s: "and if ye be in doubt as to that which We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a *surah* like unto it, and summon your witnesses…if ye are men of truth." (2:23)

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[35] See Appendix A for the more extended discussion comparing Moses & Muhammad's miracles & proofs.
[36] For further discussion on scriptures and the Qur'an as a 'book', see Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'an's self image: writing and authority in Islam's scripture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

The constant message of the Qur'an—reiterated through its representation of Moses—is that the guidance provided by the divine revelations is not just a social ritual, a pastime, or intellectual comfort, but has eternal consequences for one's state of being that starts in this very moment. There are very few chapters of the Qur'an that do not at-least implicitly refer to a Prophet's role as "a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings." He warns the people of punishments if they do not hearken to the truth that their soul naturally recognizes, and he is a bringer of glad-tidings of the blessings of those who turns faithfully towards God. As Fazlur Rahman notes, the Prophet's role is more to inform of the serious nature of life, rather than to compel or force people to obey God. Their task is "only to preach" (3:20; 5:99; 16:82; 24:54; 29:18) and "you cannot force them."[37] As described in the Qur'an, this was also the role of Moses. He patiently admonished the Pharaoh, giving him multiple chances, to humble himself before the universal God and let the Israelites worship and live with freedom. If Pharaoh does this, he will receive blessings, and if not, calamities and plagues will strike. "We called (to Moses), Yet (art thou sent) as a Mercy from thy Lord, to give warning to a people…that they may receive admonition." (28:46)

The Qur'an says that God always gives fair warning for the grave consequences of the daily choices of our lives. It is only after God has sent His Messenger to 'rehearse' His "Signs" and message that a people are held accountable. (Q. 28:59) He calls the people to a serious purpose in life, transcending material comforts and social prestige, for which they are accountable before God and for which God judges them: "Have they not considered within themselves that God hath not created the Heavens and the Earth and all

[37] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 86.

that is between them but for a serious end, and for a fixed term? But truly most men believe not that they shall meet their Lord." (30:8) In His first revelation unto Moses, according to the Qur'an, God says to him: ""Verily the Hour is coming—My design is to keep it hidden—for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its endeavour." (20:15) Thus, we do not know when the hour of reckoning will come whence we will receive our just return for our efforts. Waiting until this hour to commit to the existential facts of life is presented as too late. For Pharaoh's persecutions, "We seized him and his hosts, and We flung them into the sea." (28:40) Yet, "when the (fate of) drowning overtook him, he exclaimed: "I believe that there is no God save Him in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender (unto Him). " "What! Now! When hitherto thou hast rebelled and been of the wrong-doers?"" (10:90) Thus, even though we are admonished by the potential reward and punishment, the Qur'an depicts a God who accepts sincerity and purity of heart, accepting God's message not because of fear of pain or hope for pleasure but for the very sake of the good, for love of the virtue of virtue and God as God.

This leads us to another characteristic of the Qur'an's model of Prophet-hood: Because the truth of the message is self-evident, each person's soul is convinced, yet they persist in habits of iniquity and arrogance, and willfully accuse it of being 'manifest sorcery.' (27:13-14) Mustansir Mir, scholar of Islam at Youngston State University in Ohio, explains that the Pharaoh-Moses episode illustrates an important Qur'anic theme—those who deny the truth would not believe even if they were shown miracles. The Moses story affords the Qur'an the opportunity to explain central themes of its own message. Among those themes is that those who wish to deny that which they already

know to be true explain away superhuman actions as feats that any talented fellow can perform. This is exemplified when Pharaoh argues that Moses' miracles are merely magic tricks (26:30-35).[38] Likewise, Muhammad was accused of being a crazed poet or magician (21:2-8; 37:35-37). Meanwhile, when people are communicated truth, they know it, yet can nevertheless willfully persist in their habits of error: "But when our Signs came to them, that should have opened their eyes, they said: "This is sorcery manifest!" And they rejected those Signs in iniquity and arrogance, though their souls were convinced thereof: so see what was the end of those who acted corruptly!" (27:13-14) Thus, through discussion of the Moses-Pharaoh episode, the Qur'an calls on an integrity and unity between heart, mind, and soul that in our own attachments to our own customs and self-interests, we do not trick ourselves into denying that which rings true at the deepest levels of our inner being.

A chief recurrent message to the opponents of the Qur'an is that the powerful and influential have opposed each and every Messenger. Farid Esack says that knowing this is encouraging to the Prophet, realizing that similar adversities had met each of God's previous Messengers.[39] Likewise, the potential believer is not discouraged by this alone from following the Prophet, knowing that attacks by the leaders of the day is prototypical. Rather, potential believers perceive in leaderships' opposition the return of an archetypal role that occurs around the mission of each true Prophet. If many Hebrews were not deterred by the opposition of Pharaoh from following Moses, how much less should the people around Muhammad be discouraged by the attacks of the chiefs of Mecca from believing in this new Prophet.

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[38] Mustansir Mir. "Uses of the word "ummah" in the Qur'an," in the series *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, vol. 3: *Style and Structure*, ed. Colin Turner, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 203-8.
[39] Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction*, 72.

Furthermore, the part that each plays affirms to some degree the validity of the Prophet. That he is steadfast, courageous, and willing to sacrifice everything for a cause suggests he is not after worldly possessions and comforts. Instead, he goes against the wishes of the authorities who do all in their power to extinguish him and his cause. Similarly, Kenneth Cragg—an Anglican priest and scholar who approaches Islam with sympathetic enthusiasm—argues that Muhammad uses this Moses-model to point out to his intended Arab recipients of his message the ever recurring phenomenon that all messengers are rejected as disturbers of the old order, even though that which they bring is better than what is customary.[40] Qur'an 10:78 says: "They [Pharaoh's people] said: "Hast thou come to us to turn us a way from the ways We found our fathers following—in order that thou and thy brother may have greatness in the land? But not we shall believe in you!"" Indeed, in Qur'an 5:104 Muhammad cites the same protestation against his message by the people of his own day: "And when it is said to them, "Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Apostle," they say: "That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us.""[41] The Prophet does not call the people to what is easy but challenges them to push against the inertia of social norms.

Moses is drawn upon to suggest that if the Prophet's goal was to win a popularity contest, he would not go so far in completely challenging and overhauling the status quo. He perceives injustices with a clear eye, and works as an "upholder and defender of the victim of oppression."[42] Moses was an upholder and defender, championing the well-being and liberation of the Israelites. The surah called Stories [*Al-Qaṣas*] focuses on

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[40] Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its Scripture* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), p. 63-65.
[41] This is a very prevalent theme. Also see: Qur'an 2:107; 7:28; 7:173; 11:62; 14:10; 21:53; 26:74; 31:21
[42] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'í Publishing Trust, 1976), 285.

Moses and the Israelites, emphasizing the theme of justice: "And We wished to be gracious to those who were being oppressed in the land, to make them leaders (in faith) and make them heirs, To establish a firm place for them in the land…" (Q. 28:5-6) This is not just an interest in oppressed men, but that of children, especially orphans—like Moses and Muhammad themselves—and the well-being and belief of women: "Thus did We restore him to his mother, that her eye might be solaced [*taqarra 'aynuhā*], that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true: but most of them do not understand." (28:13) Likewise, a consistent theme of the Qur'anic revelations from the Mecca through the Medina period is care and charity to the poor, the orphan, the captive, the widow, the wayfarer, neighbor and stranger, to free the slave, and to treat women with kindness and dignity, for the sake of the love of God, desiring neither reward nor praise.[43]

The Prophet's challenge was to reshape an idea and practice of community whose pulsating life-blood were religious pieties rather than ancestry and kinship ties. Although different statements to this effect can be traced from near the beginning years of his ministry, the heart of his message for the constitution of his religious community may perhaps be found in *surah* 3:102-4, believed to have been revealed at the beginning of Muhammad's Medina period:

> O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of *islam* [surrender to God]. And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided. Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity."

[43] Qur'an 2:177, revealed in Medina, is a robustly complete listing of such worthy social justice imperatives; Surah 107 Al-Mā'ūn (Small Kindnesses / Neighborly Needs), revealed in Mecca is also an influential call to the vitality of one's faith, and the sincerity of prayer, resulting in such ethical commands.

In this manner, as Fazlur Rahman has pointed out, the Prophet's duty is to succeed in delivering the message in order "to reform the earth and remove corruption therefrom" and to implement an ethically based social order wherein "good shall be commanded and evil prohibited" and "God's sovereignty shall be upheld."[44] The Message should not just be mentally accepted, intellectually affirmed or verbally given an oath to, but must be implemented. Only then is it the Message.[45]

The Qur'an uses the story of Moses and the Israelites to develop many of the concepts and commands that had direct, immediate applicability to the body of the followers of Muhammad. Surahs ten and seven that we will focus upon here are understood to have been revealed around the middle of the Meccan period of Muhammad's ministry. As such, they can be taken as one of the earlier expressions of Muhammad's concern for developing a community of faith who embody surah 3:102-4.

Moses' interactions with the Israelites, as described in Qur'an 10:83-93, had many obvious parallels to the situation of the Meccan believers. They could use such verses to strengthen their own faith in the precedence of religious history and the meanings the 'recitations' gave to it. A minor portion of the Israelites are represented as embracing the same religion as that of Muhammad: belief in the one God, putting their trust in Him, and submitting to Him (10:84). However, it was due to fear of Pharaoh's persecution that only a small number of Israelites committed to that which they know is true. (10:83) Also, like in Mecca, it was only a small part of the Prophet's own tribe and some slaves who at-first embraced the message—a message which is presented as not novel but a very old and traditional one re-emphasized by Messengers from age to age.

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[44] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 83.
[45] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 17.

Verse 10:87 says that that Moses and Aaron established God's worship among the followers in Egypt, before they left in the Exodus, just like Muhammad did so in Mecca before he and the Emigrants left in the Hijra.[46] After they prayed for liberation from the oppressive Egyptians, God led them across the sea, and "We settled the Children of Israel in a beautiful dwelling-place, and provided for them sustenance of the best." (10:85-86, 93) In this way, Muhammad is instructing his followers in Mecca of the significance of their persecutions: a chance to show patience and steadfastness in faith (7:128-129) and also to be instruments of God's tests to the oppressors.[47] This would-be community appreciates the spiritual significance of tests and difficulties as opportunities for God's servants to show forth virtues. A common pursuit of God's law, ethic, and virtues is, thus, the bond that unites His community.

Verse 7:159 presents God's purpose as not just wanting to liberate the Israelites but to make them examples and embodiment of the very godly attributes that their oppressors lacked: "And of Moses' folk there is a community who lead with truth and establish justice therewith." Doing so would make of them worthy of being God's trustees of social, political, and religious leadership. Earlier in this chapter the Qur'an states that God makes the land a heritage unto those—though they are of no account—who pray to God for help, who are patient and constant, and are righteous. (7:128-129, 137) They, furthermore, "do right, …practice regular charity, and…believe in Our signs." (7:156; also see 5:12) As these surahs were revealed in Mecca, they probably acted to

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[46] We do not know if this emphasis on the Exodus story also reflects a premonition by Muhammad of a future rise to power through an emigration to Medina, as chronologists believe this chapter was revealed during the latter part of the Prophet's mission in Mecca. However, some of his followers had already left, across the sea, to Abyssinia (Ethiopia), for a term, to try to escape the religious persecutions in Mecca. W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 58-59.

[47] Kevin P. Edgecomb, "Chronological Order of Quranic Surahs," Bombaxo, last modified September 23, 2010, accessed April 23, 2018, http://www.bombaxo.com/chronsurs.html.

instill hope and encouragement while the followers of Muhammad were still under intense persecutions.[48]

The Qur'an—like the Jewish Bible—emphasizes principles of reciprocity or covenant between God/Prophet and the followers. If they do the above, and "honor him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him," they "will prosper," (Q. 7:157) inherit "lands whereon We sent down our blessings," (7:137) and be admitted to "gardens with rivers flowing beneath." Qur'an 7:152-171 further elaborates upon God favoring the patient and constant, but chastising the wavering in the community, such as those who worshiped the calf or who were not satisfied with being nourished with manna, quails, and water.[49] A theme then in these stories and the rest of the Qur'an is that God's servants are often asked to sacrifice customary comforts for spiritual bounties. In this way Muhammad educates his community to be satisfied with God's will, a will that sometimes gives one what is needed instead of what one desires or expects.

The Qur'an clearly conveys that the Muslim community had no more—or less—prerogative to perfection, virtue, or being God's people than the Israelites. Rather, like any other people, they had to work to merit distinction. That they are just as prone to error, even while they were directly under Muhammad's guidance, as any other religious group is exemplified in their own kind of 'golden calf' episode in the Battle of Uhud. There the Muslims suffered reverses in what would have been a military victory—and even allowed for Muhammad himself to almost be killed—when the archers went against Prophet's orders and abandoned their positions of tactical advantage. Securing booty instead of following God's will through the Prophet became as a golden calf, when they

[48] Perhaps the famous line of Jesus "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" had a similar intent.
[49] On the covenant, also see Qur'an 47:7; 22:40, 40:51, & 37:116.

left their posts to raid and despoil the camps of their Meccan opponents.[50] Like Jewish history as told in the Torah, Old Testament, or Qur'an, this episode presaged that Muslims were also to suffer many reverses and triumphs, self-abasement and then rising up in dedication again, in their attempts to learn and consistently follow God's teachings.

In this context of Israelites-as-model we understand the Qur'an's criticisms of the Jewish in the *surah*s two and five. Instead of an attempt to belittle this kindred religious community, they are to be taken as admonishments on the character of a model community. In these verses the Qur'an commands the people to "call to mind my special favor which I bestowed upon you," to "fulfil your Covenant with Me," obscure not the truth with your own idle fancies, "be steadfast in prayer, practice regular charity," humble yourself before God, and practice what you preach. (Q. 2:40-44) Chapter five narrates that Moses commanded his people to enter the holy land, but the Israelites saw in there a people of "exceeding strength," were afraid to enter, even though two scouts created a plan for their success.[51] As a result, God had them wander for forty years in the wilderness to chasten them.[52] The message to his Meccan followers is clear: those who have faith and fulfill that which He asks, although the road seems much more difficult, God guides the people to find the resources to accomplish whatever He asks of them; and those who do not have faith actually end up taking a more difficult road.

God assures ultimate triumph for His Prophet and people who choose His way, although even surviving seems doubtful when they oppose the most powerful and

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[50] See W.M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 138-139.
[51] Numbers 13:18-25 in the Bible refers to twelve scouts being sent out, but ten gave only doubts about the Jewish's ability to overcome the local population; the other two believed it could be done. In Numbers 14:37 God strikes down the ten other spies for their negative scouting report.
[52] Numbers 14: 23 & 34 God decrees that it should be forty years so that the generation of doubters would die; only their children would successfully enter the Holy Land.

strongest institutions of society. Fazlur Rahman says that Muhammad draws upon Moses and Noah and others in similar ways: that even though the mission of the Prophet seems suicidal, against the human powers that be, if and because it's true, God ultimately gives assistance for it to succeed while its opponents are defeated. Likewise, "Muhammad must equally be vindicated: he will not only be saved but his Message will be victorious."[53] As God defeated Moses' enemies, drowning them in the sea, and empowering his people to take the land of Canaan for an inheritance, so did God have Muhammad escape the plots of the ruling Quraysh, becoming the ruler of Medina/Yathrib. He and his original Meccan followers eventually overtook their erstwhile persecutors in Mecca and secured much of the Arabian peninsula, even knocking at the door of the Byzantine empire to the north. After Muhammad dies, some of his longest and most devoted followers—Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Ali, and 'Uthman—became the rulers of an expanding empire that included Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Persia.

Alongside this schemata of what makes up Prophethood and the Community, it is also helpful to pause to reflect on what the Qur'an does *not* focus upon with Moses and the Jews. The most salient feature of Muhammad's own mission that is not focused upon in Moses is that of military leadership in violent force. As opposed to Jesus, Moses and his successor Joshua were the heads of an armed body politic, like Muhammad became soon after his emigration to Medina. The Qur'an only mentions Moses killing the slave-driver Egyptian and then asking God for forgiveness (28:15), and also the possible confrontation with the Canaanites that most Jews ran from and were thus forced to wander for forty years (5:23). Missing is any martial account, such as that of the battle with the Amaleks of Exodus chapter seventeen of the Bible. We can only offer

[53] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 87.

speculations on this seeming intentional omission, such as not wanting to paint the Jews as military heroes but self-seeking cowards, since the Jewish tribes of Medina did not want to assist militarily with Muhammad's leadership. However, more likely to me is that the Qur'an intends to paint military leadership as an "on-demand" incidental aspect of Prophet-hood and not as essential or inherently necessary, for many Prophets—according to Biblical and Qur'anic history—never had to lead armed forces, or if they did, then only off and on.

Taking the Qur'an's depiction of Moses as a model or pattern, we can see him as a leader who God chose to array with a robe made of interlaced sheaves of light. Each light is a divine attribute that he manifests in his mission. They are not independent, but each spiritual virtue reinforces and illumines the brightness and brings out the color of the other through contrast and harmony. From our descriptions above, we can say that among these divine virtues that make up his robe are power, knowledge, wisdom, truth, eloquence of speech, fortitude, courage, sacrifice, faith and trust, justice and loving-kindness, forbearance and clemency, and victory. Fascinatingly, from what we have seen, this robe of light may also adorn the Prophet's community, but—unlike kinship inheritances—this is something they must work for by their own endeavor, rather than purely a consequence of birthright.

It is through the systematic repertoire of ideas of the story of Moses and his Prophet-hood that Muhammad, by analogical extension, applies to meaningfully communicate his own station and mission to his people. His challenge is the challenge of every figure in history who has striven to revolutionize the way individuals and groups think and act. They cannot just say something of great significance about the nature of

life, however significant it may be. For full-hearted and long-standing commitment, for their hearers it must be linked to and become the Ultimate Meaning, the grounding framework of their entire lives. To do this, he drew upon what his hearers already knew, yet reshaped and reoriented their understanding of prophethood through Moses and community and kinship through the Israelites. In doing so, he was also able communicate concepts about divinity, poetic words, messages, and bonds of blood: that his god was not just another god but the God, his message was the Message, his poetic words are the most beautiful and soul-stirring because they are God's words, and that true bonds of blood is not based on illustrious ancestry but by the life-blood of spiritual attributes—virtues that are the very grounding of all significances.

Appendix A

In considering the nature of Moses' signs or miracles, we can further examine the sequence of verses between 10:74 and 10:82. It has been assumed that each Prophet does different kinds of miracles to prove his station of divine authority, as described in the Qur'an (and in later tafsīr [interpretation]), but these verses move between an emphasis on distinguished utterances and that of the miracle of Moses' staff-serpent consuming those of the Pharaoh's magicians in such wise that it seems that pronouncements as self-evident truth was also a proof that Moses manifested. He comes with "Clear Signs" [*ayāt bayīnāt*, or just *bayīnāt*—clear arguments]. In 10:74, the Qur'an speaks of each Messenger bringing unto their people *bayīnāt*. *Bayīnāt* is usually translated as either 'clear signs,' 'clear arguments,' or sometimes 'miracles.' 10:75 says that Moses and Aaron were sent unto Pharaoh with God's *ayāt*. *Ayāt* is either translated as 'signs,' 'verses,' or 'miracles,' depending on the context. Traditionally, the proof of Muhammad's Messenger-ship has been regarded as the *ayāt*-as-verses, i.e. the qur'anic utterances revealed through him. This is affirmed in: "And if ye be in doubt as to that which We have sent down unto Our servant, then produce a Surah like unto it and summon your witnesses beside God, if ye be men of truth." (2:16) Verse 10:76 reads, "When the truth came to them from Us they said: This is most surely clear enchantment [*siḥrun mubīnun*]!" This last phrase has also been translated as 'magic,' 'sorcery,' 'the sorceries,' and can also be translated as 'incantations' because of the inherent meaning of 'utterance' in *mubīn*. Curiously, the same accusations were made to Muhammad against either his utterances as well as his teaching of the resurrection of the dead (See 34:43, 37:15, 46:6). After narrating the confrontation with the "magicians," this narration closes

with: “God verifies the truth [*al-haqqu*] by His words, though sinners be averse.'” (10:82) From all this, what I am suggesting here is that even with his miracles with snakes, according to the Qur’an, the core of Moses’ proof was also his prophetic utterance as axiomatic truth. Furthermore, in this chapter, Muhammad even sets up the showdown between Moses and the magicians as paralleling the contests between the Meccans who challenged Muhammad’s assertion to his proof being his special ‘recitations’. In other words, the Qur'an purposely used words so rich and flexible of meaning, so that the showdown between the Moses and the magicians could be easily seen as parallel and very synonymous to the *ayāt bi-kalimāt* confrontations and evidences provided by Muhammad to the antagonistic Meccans. Thus, Moses' 'miracles' can be seen as not just the 'magic' with the snakes, but also his own 'utterances' he was bidden by God at the Burning Bush to say to Pharaoh's court. And in each case—whether snake-staff or utterances—the Prophet’s sign “straightway swallows up all the falsehoods which they fake!” (26:45)

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