

David and Muhammad – A Comparative Study

There is a current trend in many circles to paint a favorable picture of Muhammad. For example, Karen Armstrong wrote in her book, *Muhammad, A Prophet For Our Time*, “His (Muhammad’s) career illustrated the perfect surrender that every human being should make to the divine,” (p.14). Martin Lings, a former companion of C. S. Lewis, who converted to Islam, in his book, *Muhammad: His Life And Times Based On The Earliest Sources*, wrote a biography of Muhammad that affirmed him as a prophet of God. Annemarie Schimmel in her book, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, entitled chapter two, “Muhammad, The Beautiful Model.” And even in our own camp, the late Ralph Winter suggested, in my presence, that we should look at Muhammad as an Old Testament prophet in the sense that as the Old Testament prophets pointed forward to Jesus, Muhammad pointed back to Jesus. Even John Esposito, a Roman Catholic scholar in his book, *Islam: The Straight Path*, describes Islam as Muslims understand it with no effort to use spiritual discernment in evaluating it¹.

Over against Esposito’s uncritical presentation, another Roman Catholic scholar, Robert Spencer, in his book, *The Truth about Muhammad*, digs into early Muslim sources in both Quran and Hadith to paint an unglossed picture of Muhammad. Spencer is meticulous in using only recognized and reliable Muslim sources. The picture that emerges is so bad that it has caused many Muslims to leave Islam. The recent book by Nabeel Qureshi entitled *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, is a case in point.

When I was asked to make a presentation to this consultation, the idea behind the invitation was to present a traditional view of Muhammad, presumably to counterbalance the picture of the popular, modern-day idealized version, such as has been done by the authors mentioned above.

That struck me as a rather boring assignment. As I mulled this over and spent time in the Word and prayer, the Lord gave me the idea of contrasting the lives of the prophet David and Muhammad. On the surface, there are prominent similarities in their lives: they both led victorious armies; they both were brave in battle; they both were polygamous; they both caused people to be executed. Some would foolishly use these superficial similarities to affirm Muhammad in his prophet-hood. But a deeper examination of critical events in his life leads to a different conclusion.

In the next few pages, I plan to compare these two men in the four following areas of their lives: first, the circumstances attending how their ministries began; second, their attitudes toward praise and worship, particularly the role of music; third, the event of the recovery of the Ark of the Covenant, as contrasted with the restoration of the sacred stone in the corner of the Kaaba; and fourth, the issue of how each man handled his sin of adultery.

In setting out to do this, I have abandoned the secular humanist approach of looking at these matters through the eyes of the social sciences. I propose to use the Holy Spirit's gift of spiritual discernment in appraising these two men. For the Scripture teaches us that we are to test the spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1). And, "The things that come from the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned" (my summary of 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Let's begin with the circumstances of David's appointment to his office. The prophet Samuel was directed by the Lord to go to the house of Jesse and anoint one of his sons to be king in place of Saul. When Samuel saw David, the eighth son of Jesse, the Lord said, "He is the one." "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13).

Now let's look at the events surrounding Muhammad's appointment to prophet-hood. The following is a summary of these events. In a period of meditation in a cave, a spirit being appeared to Muhammad and commanded him to recite. Muhammad was terrified and speechless. The spirit being drew near and began to press Muhammad's body to the point where he couldn't breathe, possibly choking him. Muhammad finally surrendered to this spirit being. Immediately after this encounter, Muhammad rushed home to his wife in terror saying he thought he was possessed by a *jinn* (an evil spirit). She, along with an aged relative, a Christian monk, persuaded Muhammad that this spirit being was the angel Gabriel. After this, there was a long period of nothing happening during which Muhammad attempted to commit suicide. Eventually, Muhammad again sought contact with this spirit being. These encounters were usually accompanied by strange and unusual effects on Muhammad's face and body. This raises the most critical question in all in the study of Islam: Who was that spirit being? We shall address this question at the end of the study. For the moment, I will make this brief, summary statement: to David came the Spirit of life: to Muhammad, the spirit of death.

Let's move on to the subject of praise, worship and the place of music in the life of a believer. David was gifted with the ability to play the harp and compose what we call psalms today. The psalms are meant to be sung². He also organized choirs for praising the Lord. In the psalms attributed to David, you will find such phrases as: "Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy" (Psalm 33:1-3), and, "Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise" (Psalm 47:6,7).

When we look at the instructions of Muhammad, we learn that he forbade music in the mosque³. He wanted his followers to hear only his voice and to imitate him in reciting his words in the Arabic language. More recently, the Islamic Fiqh Council forbade the listening to music or musical instruments⁴. It is interesting to

note that in the human brain the Lord designed a special place for music. By forbidding music in worship, Muhammad, wittingly or unwittingly, usurped that place in the human brain allocated for music and captured it for his voice alone. No music will reverberate in the brain of a Muslim who truly follows Muhammad. Of course, as we all know, the Sufis were famous for their singing, but Muhammad was not a Sufi: just ask the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. In thinking about this strange behavior of Muhammad, a line from Shakespeare comes to mind. It was spoken by Lorenzo in the drama, "The Merchant of Venice."

The man that hath no music in himself, nor is moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, strategems, and spoils; the motions of his spirit are as dull as night, and his affections dark as Erebus⁵; let no such man be trusted. (Act 5, Scene 1, line 29ff.)

The third pair of contrasts has to do with the Ark of the Covenant being restored to the Israelites and its relocation in Jerusalem by David, and the story of Muhammad's key role in the restoration of the "sacred stone" to its place in the outside corner of the Kaaba, as it was being rebuilt.

Recall that in the great defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant (from Moses' day) was captured and taken away. While they possessed it, the Philistines were afflicted with plagues and hence decided to give the Ark back. It was David's privilege to arrange for this recovery (2 Samuel 6:1-19).

In the process, a man named Uzzah was struck dead, when he reached out to steady the Ark when one of the oxen stumbled. The Law of God forbade anyone to touch the Ark. This led David to be very careful in this recovery effort. In the final stage of the journey, David sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf (as a burnt offering for sin) and proceeded to dance with all his might with shouts and the sound of trumpets (more music). At its final resting place, David sacrificed more burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (according to the Law of Moses). Thus, David upheld the Biblical teaching that it is the blood that atones for sin (Leviticus 17:11).

A somewhat equivalent episode in the life of Muhammad had to do with the Quresh tribal leaders deciding to tear down the man-high, roofless Kaaba and enlarge it and put a roof on it. The Kaaba was a pagan shrine center that predated Muhammad. From pre-Islamic times it had a meteorite "sacred stone" embedded in the corner of the building.

Before proceeding with Muhammad's story, please note that in the Law of Moses, the Israelites, as they entered the pagan land of Canaan, were instructed to smash every sacred stone, "for you are a people holy to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 7:5). Later in the same book, the Israelites are warned not to erect a sacred stone, "for these the Lord your God hates" (Deuteronomy 16:22).

Returning to the story of the rebuilding of the Kaaba, Muhammad was chosen to resolve the quarreling among the Quresh clans as to who would actually set the stone in place. He asked for a cloak, had a representative from each clan hold it by the edge, placed the stone in the middle, had them lift it up, and then he himself placed this forbidden “sacred stone” in place. In the light of God’s revelation, this was an abomination to the Lord, a thing absolutely forbidden.

Lastly, we take up the issue of the adulteries of David and Muhammad. David broke three of the Ten Commandments in committing adultery with Bathsheba. He coveted his neighbor’s wife, he cohabited with her, and he arranged to have her husband killed in battle.

In Muhammad’s story, we read that he entered the private chamber of his adopted son Zaid, in his absence, and saw Zaid’s beautiful wife thinly clad. He lusted for her. She noticed this, and when her husband came home she told him the Prophet looked longingly at her. Zaid promptly divorced his wife so that Muhammad could marry her, which he did.

What is of extreme interest at this point of the comparisons is what God did with David after his sin, and what Muhammad did with “God” to justify his behavior.

God sent his prophet Nathan to show David his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-13). David’s response was, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Psalm 51 is considered David’s great prayer-psalm of repentance. Some of the highlights of this psalm are as follows:

- *David appeals to God’s mercy and unfailing love for forgiveness.
- *David admits his sin and God’s righteousness.
- *He asks God to blot out his sin and wash him whiter than snow.
- *He asks God for a pure heart and a renewed spirit of steadfastness.
- *He asks God not to cast him away from his Presence.
- *He asks God not to take his Holy Spirit from him.
- *He asks God to restore to him the joy of salvation.

Then David gets to the heart of the sacrificial system. He states that the real sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit. He goes on to imply that when there is true contrition, then “there will be righteous sacrifices of burnt offerings on the altar.” Thus, he upheld the sacrificial system and the honor of God.

From David’s confession we learn much of his faith and his relationship with the Lord. He knew that God is both love and righteous. He knew the secret of his life was the anointing with the Holy Spirit. He knew that the sacrificial system with the shedding of blood was designed to teach that reconciliation with God is possible. He also knew that it was only when one was truly repentant the sacrifices were efficacious. In short, this psalm is loaded with the deepest revelations of how sinful man can relate to a righteous God and being reconciled can live in his presence by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In turning to Muhammad's story, we do not find even a whisper of such knowledge. Muhammad had no idea of the arrangement that God had made for the forgiveness of man's sin, or if he did, he rejected it. Muhammad, in his effort to hush up the scandal concerning his adultery and to quiet the murmuring of the people, had the audacity to put words in God's mouth by which God supposedly gave his approval for what Muhammad had done (Quran 33:37).

In summarizing the case for each man, we find that David, from beginning to end, was filled with the Spirit of God. This expressed itself in music, in the conviction of sin, in profound expressions of repentance, and in a desperate plea for God to not take his Spirit from him, but to restore to him the joy of salvation.

By contrast, we learn that Muhammad was originally accosted by a spirit that he thought was a *jinn*. The effect of this encounter was to lead Muhammad to attempt suicide. Months later, Muhammad re-established contact with this spirit. Under its influence Muhammad forbade music and singing in the worship of God. He also did something that was totally odious to God in placing a "sacred stone" at the center of Muslim worship. And he mandated that all mankind was to follow his example of kissing it. And finally, he had the unimaginable arrogance to put words in God's mouth approving of his sin of marrying his adopted son's wife.

Of David it was said in the Old Testament that he was a man after God's heart. God could have re-evaluated this assessment in the light of David's many sins, but he didn't, for in the New Testament, we read the same statement: David was a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22).

For those who would like to make a prophet hero of Muhammad, we might do well to look at a few lines from Malcolm Muggeridge's book, *A Third Testament*. He wrote these words on the occasion when the Russian Communists tried to claim Fyodor Dostoevsky as one of their own. This was a huge joke. Dostoevsky was diametrically opposed to everything the Soviet regime stood for. Muggeridge, in commenting on this, wrote: "By virtue of an amazing exercise in ideological gymnastics they (the Soviets) attempted to mold him (Dostoevsky) into seeming compatibility with the Party line - (it was) rather like discovering in Gandhi's life and writings another Genghis Khan, or in Mussolini a reincarnation of St. Francis of Assisi" (taken from *A Third Testament*, page xxiii). We must not try to find in Muhammad an image of an ideal man when the earliest Muslim biographers paint a different picture.

No. It could never be said of Muhammad that he was a man after God's heart. The spirit that was in Muhammad eventually led him to deny Jesus as Son of God; it led him to be completely silent on the reality that God is our Father; and it led him to present a very muddled picture of the Holy Spirit whom he thought was a created being. Muhammad thus denied the very essence of God as triune Father, Son and Spirit. So it's important to apply to Muhammad the criteria given in divine revelation (1 John 2:22,23; 4:1-3).

David was a man of God, anointed by the Spirit of God; a man who knew what God was like in his mercy, compassion, righteousness and justice. And David walked with God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Muhammad, as so many Muslims have told me, was a natural man. He was led by different spirit, a spirit that led him to oppose the very heart of the Lord's arrangement to save lost mankind. In the end, Muhammad, in setting up his own man-made religious system, rejected God's arrangement for the salvation of mankind and thus set himself up in opposition to God. In spite of all the patina of references to God in the Quran, the real focal point of religious affection in Islam is Muhammad, not God. And behind this man is a spirit that points away from the biblical Christ, not toward Him.

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Footnotes

1. As an aside, Esposito was given ten million dollars by the Saudi government for his Chair at Georgetown University for the purpose of improving the image of Islam in the West.
2. Note: 84 of these 150 psalms in our Scriptures are attributed to David.
3. Sunan Abu Dawood, Book 35, Number 4927, page 694 in Arabic-only version (Volume 3, Book 36, Number 4909, page 1372 in English version).
4. Islamic Fiqh Council, *Fatawa Islamiya: Islamic Verdicts*, vol. 5 (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 2001), 315.
5. Erebus is the entrance to Hades, the place of the dead, in Greek mythology.

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