

Moses (Part 3)

In the last two lessons, we tried to touch on the most important aspects of a long and interesting life, that of Moses. We could dedicate many sessions to the study of this great servant of God. Before ending the story of Moses, let's examine an important passage where Moses speaks to the people of Israel:

A PROPHET LIKE HIM

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” Moses reminded the people that when they were at the base of Mount Sinai, where the Torah, that is, the Law, was given, they had asked to no longer hear the voice of God himself, lest they die. He continued, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to My words that he speaks in My name.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 17-19).

Muslims see several similarities between Moses and Muhammad and draw the conclusion that Muhammad is the prophet whose coming is predicted in this passage. For example, Moses and Muhammad were both married men with children, both emigrated when they were wanted for murder, both led their followers to war and victory, and both gave a law and life code.

However, one can also easily see a number of similarities between Moses and Jesus. For example, shortly after his birth, Jesus was saved from certain death by God, as was Moses. Jesus and Moses were both transfigured on a mountain, leaving their faces glowing (Exodus 34:29,30 and Matthew 17:1-5). Each of them approached God to intercede for guilty people. Each of them inaugurated, by a sacrifice of blood, a covenant between God and men.

But instead of trying to see whether the Muslims or Christians are able to draw up the longest list of similarities, let us look closer at the criteria mentioned in the prophecy concerning the prophet who was to come. Here are the two criteria to examine: 1) Moses said to the people of Israel: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers,” and 2) God said the prophet would be “like” Moses.

AMONG YOUR BROTHERS

Muslim commentators like to emphasize the expression “from among your own brothers” and to suggest that the Israelites were not their own brothers... that God was undoubtedly speaking of the “brother nations” of the Israelites. According to them, we should look for this prophet among the nations which were related to the Israelites but not the Israelites themselves.

To identify the nations “related” to Israel, we must look back at history to know which nations rose from brothers of the ancestors of Israel. For example, the nation of Israel was called Israel, or Jacob, and he had a brother named Esau. The descendants of Esau were Edomites. There is a biblical passage (Deuteronomy 2:4,6) where the Edomites are called “brothers” of the Israelites. If we go back a little further, we find that Jacob’s father, who was called Isaac, had half brothers: Ishmael, Midian, Zimran, Medan and others.

According to the idea put forward by some Muslims, one could consider that the Ishmaelites (Arabs are descendants of Ishmael), the Midianites and others as “brothers” of the nation of Israel. Muhammad, being Arab, would be among the brothers of Israel. However, we should note that nowhere does the Bible use the term “brothers” in speaking of the Ishmaelites, Arabs, Midianites or other nations descended from Abraham.

But, actually, even if we wanted to consider these other people as “brother” nations to Israel, this would not establish that the prophet predicted by Moses would come out of one of these peoples. First, it would be necessary to delete the first part of what Moses said: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers...” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Since Moses was speaking to Israel, the word “you” must necessarily refer to Israel—thus the prophet would be an Israelite.

But secondly, it would be necessary to interpret the words “from among your brothers” in a singular way in order to not sound strange. Who among us, if we were told to call one of our “brothers” to occupy an important position, would draw the conclusion that members of our own family were excluded and it would be necessary to find a man whose ancestors

had been kin to our ancestors hundreds of years earlier?

As for the expression “from among your own brothers,” we have a parallel in the previous chapter. In Deuteronomy 17:14,15, Moses says to Israel, “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, take possession of it, live in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations around me,’ you are to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. Appoint a king from your brothers. You are not to set a foreigner over you, or one who is not of your people.” Now, in all their history, the Israelites were never given a non-Israelite king. God chose neither an Ishmaelite, an Edomite, a Midianite, nor one of any other nation to rule over his people. He first designated Saul, who was an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, and then the family of David who was an Israelite from the tribe of Judah.

It is clear that the prophet whose coming was predicted by Moses would be an Israelite, which disqualifies Muhammad as the fulfillment of this prophecy.

WHAT DISTINGUISHED MOSES

But let’s return to the second criteria: the prophet would be “like” Moses. We have already seen that in several ways, Muhammad was like Moses. Likewise, Jesus was like Moses in several ways. But according to the Bible itself, what distinguished Moses from other Israelites or even other prophets? What would permit the Israelites to recognize one day that the man who was a prophet “like Moses” was actually before them?

The last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy contains this eulogy of Moses:

“No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unparalleled for all the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do against the land of Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to all his land, and for all the mighty acts of power and terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.” (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

These words are generally attributed to the pen of Joshua, the inspired author of the next book in Jewish scriptures. The author does not say that such a prophet could not come from among the Israelites, but that at the time he was writing, the man had not been seen yet.

Instead what we want to notice in this passage are the traits concerning Moses which distinguish him: 1) the fact that God knew Moses face to face; and 2) the great miracles and wonders presented by Moses.

As for the first one, God himself emphasized it in Numbers 12. God spoke to other prophets in visions or in dreams, or he sent angels to them to transmit His messages. But in Numbers 12:7,8, God said, “Not so with My servant Moses... I speak with him directly, openly, and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord...” In this regard, we cannot say that Muhammad is like Moses. Muhammad never made a claim like this about himself.

Generally, Muslims say that it was the angel Gabriel who gave Muhammad the words of Qur’an, from God, of course. So we are talking about an intermediary. In Surah 53:2-5, for example, Allah says: “Your companion has neither strayed nor is he misguided, nor does he speak out of his own desire. It [the Qur’an] is nothing but revelation sent down to him. He was taught by [an angel] who is mighty in power.” As for Jesus, his language looks more like the description of Moses that we saw. Jesus told the Jews in John 8:40, “But now you are trying to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.” Later in John 12:49,50, he says, “For I have not spoken on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a command as to what I should say and what I should speak... I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.”

The second trait that distinguishes Moses from other prophets is the number and power of the miracles which he accomplished by the will of God and which clearly attest that it was God who sent him to deliver Israel and who was the author of the laws and commandments which Moses gave to the people. As for Muhammad, a reading of the Qur’an reveals that he did not do miracles as Moses did. At least seven times, we read that adversaries of Muhammad asked him, “They swear a solemn oath by God that if there should come to them a sign, they will believe in it. Say, ‘Signs are granted only by God.’ How can you tell that if a sign be given to them, they will indeed believe in it?” (6:109). “When you do not bring them a sign, they say, ‘Why do you not invent one?’ Say, ‘I follow only what is revealed to me by my

Lord. This Book is an enlightenment from your Lord and a guide and mercy to true believers” (7:203). “When you do not bring them a sign, they say, ‘Why do you not invent one?’ Say, ‘I follow only what is revealed to me by my Lord. This Book is an enlightenment from your Lord and a guide and mercy to true believers” (10:20). “They say, ‘Why has no sign been given to him by his Lord?’ Say, ‘The signs are in the hands of God. I am but a plain warner” (29:50). In each case, Allah did not give him the miraculous power to perform a sign resembling the miracles for which Moses was renowned and which would have silenced his adversaries.

The contemporaries of Jesus, on the other hand, recognized all the power he had from God. In their preaching, the apostles drew attention to these signs when they called the crowds to believe in him. In Acts 2:22, the apostle Peter described him this way: “Jesus the Nazarene was a man pointed out to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through Him, just as you yourselves know.” Even his enemies could not deny the miracles. “So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, ‘What are we going to do since this man does many signs? If we let Him continue in this way, everyone will believe in Him” (John 11:47,48). In this regard, too, we see that it was Jesus who was a prophet like Moses.

And it is certainly the conclusion drawn by people of his time. Very early in Jesus’ ministry, “Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!’” (John 1:45). Jesus himself acknowledged that Moses had spoken of him. “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me.” (John 5:46). Finally, in their preaching, the apostles clearly connected the prophecy in Deuteronomy to the person of Jesus. Peter said to the Jewish crowd:

“Moses said: ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to Him in everything He will say to you... In addition, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also announced these days... God raised up His Servant and sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.’” (Acts 3:22, 24, 26)

Conclusion

According to the Gospel, we do not need to guess about whom Moses spoke when he referred to a prophet like himself. It was obviously Jesus of Nazareth. So let us not forget to do what Moses said to do in regard to this prophet when he came—let us listen to him.