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Talking with Prophets:
Applying Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation to Prophetic Dialogue in the Qur'an

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Abstract

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In response to the long held view that the Qur'anic narrative is disjointed, this study supports the assertion that the Qur'an is a unified literary work. This dissertation aims to illustrate that the recurring prophetic stories and characters weave the Qur'anic text together. Along with prophecy, the central topics of the Qur'an are monotheism, Day of Judgment, and the covenant. However, prophecy is more crucial for understanding and unifying the Qur'an because the text uses the topic of prophecy both to introduce and to explain the other central topics.

An understanding of prophecy in the Qur'an requires a study of prophetic dialogue because dialogue, rather than narration, develops the unified prophetic character and demarcates the distinct prophetic personalities. Due to the manner in which instances of prophetic dialogue are scattered across Qur'anic *surahs*, this dissertation uses socio-rhetorical interpretative analysis as a means to fuse together the central prophetic claims which are expressed repeatedly by the speaking prophets. Rather than assuming that recurring material in the Qur'an creates disparate textual units that divide the narrative, this dissertation looks at the way in which repetition texture creates a tension that unifies and progresses central narrative claims. This synthetic approach to the Qur'an shows uniformity in the prophetic role, consistency in the Qur'anic narrative, and the subtle but significant differences between individual prophets.

Along with including an overview of the speaking prophets and their instances of dialogue, this dissertation includes close analyses of units of prophetic speech from Noah,

Solomon, and Moses. In addition, detailed innertextual and intertextual analyses of the Qur'anic dialogue of Noah and Solomon show the development of these prophets inside of the Qur'an and between sacred texts. By documenting the instances of dialogue there is a framework for the uniform prophetic character and by focusing on specific moments of dialogue there is a window on the way in which the distinct prophetic personalities voice central textual assertions.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of biblical prophets in the Qur'an has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. However, the significance of the dialogue attributed to these prophetic figures has received minimal attention. In his article, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," Mustansir Mir asserts that dialogue, as a literary element of the Qur'an, is "both interesting and important and, as such, calls for systematic study."¹ This study will provide an outline of how a methodological approach to the dialogue of biblical prophets in the Qur'an may provide insights into the overarching topics of the Qur'an and the character of the prophet in the Qur'an. The speech acts attributed to each of the Qur'anic prophets serves to develop their personalities and distinguish them from their biblical version. To illustrate an approach to the Qur'an by way of prophetic dialogue, I will address the dialogical instances of all prophets and analyze one dialogical instance of Moses plus the dialogues of the Qur'anic Solomon and Qur'anic Noah.

The Qur'an's narrative voice is displayed in an allusive style that is rich with referential reminders. This type of narrative is often short on details and continuity. As a consequence, many early western scholars of the Qur'an criticized the text for lack of literary merit. This perceived lack of literary fullness has caused difficulty for the lay reader and specialists attempting to approach the Qur'an.² Yet, much of this criticism and difficulty is a result of a piecemeal approach to textual investigations of the Qur'an that lack adequate attention to unity within Qur'anic discourse.

¹Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 1-22, esp. p. 2.

²In his book, *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), Thomas Carlyle writes that "with every allowance, one feels it difficult to see how any mortal ever could consider this Koran as a Book written in Heaven, too good for the Earth; as a well-written book, or indeed as a *book* at all; and not a bewildered rhapsody; *written*, so far as writing goes, as badly as almost any book ever was!" (p. 58).

In contrast to that atomistic method, this study will use socio-rhetorical interpretative analysis to demonstrate unity within Qur'anic discourse and to identify recurring narrative themes. I will apply socio-rhetorical interpretation to prophetic dialogue to show the manner in which the presentation of prophetic character is used to enact overarching Qur'anic themes and address central topics. In particular, the dialogue of Noah and Solomon will be studied and contrasted to demonstrate the role and personality of the prophet in the Qur'an.

Overview of Qur'anic Studies

Qur'anic studies in modern Western scholarship began with Abraham Geiger's influential book, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* (1833).³ In his study, Geiger established methodological approaches which later scholars followed by attempting to locate the 'Jewish material' of the Qur'an. In response to Jewish scholarly claims on the majority of Qur'anic material, Christian scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Tor Andrae, among others, set out to demonstrate Christian influences on the Qur'an. The attempts of scholars from both camps to find the ur-source of the Qur'anic material were problematic because they examined the Qur'an through the lens of Biblical scholarship, which inhibited a comprehensive study of the Qur'an.

Three overarching, and interconnected, problems emerge from the ur-source approach taken by these Western scholars: (1) *What* they hoped to find (the origins of the text), (2) *why* they searched for the origin of the Qur'an (to show how Muhammad borrowed this material to serve his political and social needs), and (3) *how* they approached the Qur'an (with an atomistic view and a teleological perspective).

³Translated from the German as "What did Mohammed take from Judaism," Geiger received a doctorate from the University of Marburg upon completion of this essay.

First, rather than studying the way in which the Qur’anic narrative interacted with its initial audience or with the ensuing generations of listeners and readers, Qur’anic scholarship in the nineteenth, and well into the twentieth, century focused on locating the origin of Qur’anic material so as to distinguish which religious tradition was most influential for Muhammad’s message. Aside from not considering how the Qur’anic narrative relates with its audience, the most significant issue with this method of Qur’anic scholarship is the manner in which it categorically discounts what the Qur’an says about its own origins. This early approach to the Qur’an began with an assumption that dismisses divine origins for the Qur’an and looks to Muhammad as the author of the text.⁴ However, to better understand and explore the agenda of the text, the nature of Qur’anic theology and even ‘mysterious forces’ at play beyond the actors mentioned in the narrative, it is necessary to locate the role of the Divine in the texture of the Qur’an. Since God is a speaking character in the text, this study examines the Qur’anic presentation of God’s dialogue with His prophets as a literary strategy for locating and describing the nature of the Divine in the Qur’an.

While the Qur’an shares many narrative characteristics with the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, the Qur’an differs from these sacred texts by assuming divine authorship as the source of the authenticity of the Qur’an. Many of the early western Qur’anic scholars were writing at a time in biblical studies when it was a common practice to assume that Moses authored the Hebrew Bible. From this perspective, the idea that a human hand wrote a scripture

⁴In contrast to the view of the early western scholarship, this dissertation acknowledges the work of *Intentional Fallacy* by W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley. From the perspective of Wimsatt and Beardsley, the “intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1946), pp. 468-488, esp. p. 468). The life and the intention of the author are ancillary issues to the way in which the narrative is understood by the audience of the text. Although the life of Muhammad is relevant to a comprehensive understanding of the Qur’an, the primary focus of a Qur’anic study should investigate the audience's reception of the narrative.

does not diminish the religious authenticity of the text. For example, in Judaism there is the belief that the large corpus of rabbinic writing (included in Talmudic and Midrashic works) is a form of scripture (Oral Torah) and divinely inspired. Therefore, the assumption that Muhammad authored the text did not automatically moderate the authenticity of the text.

The claim by western Qur'anic scholars of Muhammad's authorship of the Qur'an, on its own, would not necessarily disqualify the Qur'an as a divinely inspired text. For Muslim scholars, God's persistent call to remember the biblical prophets in the context of repeated guidance and warning appeared to confirm the divine origin of the Qur'an as a new prophetic word of God. However, the primary focus for these early western scholars was the origin of this prophetic material and the primary issue was that the accounts of the biblical prophets in the Qur'an looked like they were simply borrowed from the Bible. The Qur'anic claim of divine authenticity was challenged by the western scholarly assumption that the prophetic stories originated in earlier religious traditions and that Muhammad borrowed the prophetic material from these traditions.

A second common characteristic of this early period in Qur'anic studies was a concern with the intentions and character of Muhammad. Generally, early scholarship described Muhammad as one who genuinely believed in his mission, inauthentic as the Western scholars considered it. By discounting any notion of the Qur'an as representing the word of God, Western studies on the Qur'an were interested in how Muhammad received his religious learning, why he wanted to use material from earlier religious traditions, and the way in which the appeal to Judaism, Christianity, and pre-Islamic Arabian traditions served a political agenda in his later prophetic career. While the assumption that Muhammad was the author of the Qur'an

may not have delegitimized the sacred text, a concern with his character and understanding how his 'agenda' influenced the Qur'an placed a shadow over a study of the text itself.

Third, when the text was studied, it was often studied from an atomistic perspective. Many early scholars of the Qur'an focused on individual verses or Biblical characters that could either be located in older religious traditions or were inconsistent with other sacred texts. This approach extended to philological investigations which focused on locating words that were "borrowed" from Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac. These scholars claimed that the similarities with other religious traditions were because Muhammad borrowed from older traditions, and that inconsistencies with other religious texts were attributed to Muhammad's misunderstanding of earlier religious traditions. This "borrowing" argument not only enabled Jewish and Christian scholars to claim that Muhammad used, or misused, earlier religious texts, but also challenged the Islamic view which considered the Arabic of the Qur'an to be "pure" Arabic.

There are two significant issues with the atomistic approach and teleological argument that serve the claim of religious borrowing. First, it discounts the ways in which the Qur'an itself uses these verses to develop distinct topics (in particular, prophecy) and to present a uniquely Qur'anic narrative. Second, it discounts the ways in which Jewish and Christian beliefs and practices developed alongside Islam. In regard to Judaism, much of Rabbinic Judaism, as we know it, was formed during the Islamic period and it was influenced by its interaction with a developing Islam. That is to say, the relationship between lender and borrower is not as clear as the ur-source method assumes.

According to Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth, the criticisms of Geiger's scholarship (as the progenitor of the quest for Jewish themes in the Qur'an) was first made by Johann Fück in 1936 and may have led to the slow move away from comparative work in the Qur'an and

toward a consideration of, solely, Arabic sources. Along with Fuck's criticism, Sinai and Neuwirth assert that the activities of the Nationalist Socialist Party, leading up to World War II, diminished German Jewish scholarship on the Qur'an. Therefore, by the 1940s, the number of scholars who were able and willing to do meaningful work comparing Qur'anic and rabbinic material reduced drastically.⁵

Following World War II and into the 1960s, as indicated by the scholarship of Rudi Paret and W. Montgomery Watt, the primary focus became Muhammad, not the Qur'an. Therefore, Qur'anic scholarship became Muhammad scholarship.⁶ However, I would argue that this should not be seen as a complete break from earlier Qur'anic studies. One of the overlooked aspects of Geiger's work is the way in which he attempts to construct a robust image of Muhammad and how he understood and made use of Jewish material. Moreover, the development of Muhammad, the man, continued in later works which were focused, primarily, on Jewish and Christian themes in the Qur'an. One only needs to consult the work of Richard Bell, for example, to see the continued development of the character of Muhammad. A curious aspect of the approach of both Geiger and Bell is that in developing the character of Muhammad they rely on a varying degree of Islamic exegetical literature to form a framework for the character of Muhammad. Then, they fill in the missing portions of his image by describing a prophet who is based, largely, on their creative instincts.

As a consequence of this Muhammad scholarship, Sinai and Neuwirth paint a picture of the second half of the 20th century where the general sentiment among many Qur'anic scholars was that the Qur'an did not merit the sophisticated methodologies used in studying the Bible and

⁵A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 4-5.

⁶Ibid, p. 6.

that the figure of Muhammad had been detailed sufficiently by European Orientalists. However, the skepticism of John Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* (1977) and Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's *Hagarism* (1977) generated a new level of excitement in the study of the Qur'an by discounting the premise that the Qur'an should be approached with the assumption that it belongs in its initial seventh century, Islamic context.⁷ In contrast to the traditionalist work of Geiger, the work of Wansbrough and Crone is often categorized as revisionist. Yet, to label these works as simply revisionist, is to do them a disservice. For example, discussions surrounding Wansbrough's work should not just address his claim about the later canonization of the Qur'an, but his contribution of a form-critical approach to *tafsir* and *sira* literature as well.

To understand Wansbrough, however, it is necessary to understand that in his view any attempt at what really happened during the canonization process is obscured. It is noticed by many that Wansbrough challenged the accepted mode of Qur'anic scholarship. However, Stewart clarifies Wansbrough's contribution to the study of the Qur'an:

“While supporters are correct in asserting that Wansbrough challenged a number of assumptions often adopted in both traditional and Western scholarship on the Qur'an, they generally do not acknowledge that he substituted for them another set of assumptions almost as rigid as the first.”⁸

Wansbrough's new assumptions rest on the claim “that the Qur'an was edited and constructed from a plethora of short texts that he terms prophetic *logia*.”⁹ These short texts, or *logia*, pull

⁷Ibid, pp. 2-7.

⁸Devin Stewart, “Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'an,” *forthcoming*, p. 7.

⁹Ibid, p. 7.

from well-known biblical prophetic stories in the monotheistic tradition. For Wansbrough the “goal of the critic is to identify these *logia* by examining the canonical text in which they have been edited and spliced together.”¹⁰ Wansbrough adopts the view that the splicing together of the Qur’an trailed the process of an established Islamic community demarcating itself from its surrounding Jewish communities. Therefore, the Qur’an was created at a time much later than accepted Islamic belief. As a consequence, the text is not reflective of its described social context. Instead, the initial living context of the Qur’an is lost in the fog of history and nobody can catch the fog.

Wansbrough’s placement of the Qur’an in a dense dating and location fog contributed to a switch from a focus on Qur’an over to scholarly Islamic exegesis, historiography, and hagiography. Rather than taking Wansbrough’s, admittedly, speculative work as an invitation for further work, it was received as a sign to move on from Qur’anic studies. Nevertheless, there is a resurgence in Qur’anic interest and Qur’anic studies.

Recent scholarly interest in the Qur’an is most likely influenced by a rise in popular interest in Islam. A foreign policy focus on the Middle East for the last decade and a half created an environment where western society yearned for information about what was deemed a largely unknown religion in an extremely complicated region. Even before the general attention on “all things Islamic that followed the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001,” the beginning of this rise in interest in the Qur’an could be traced to Toby Lester’s article “What is the Koran?” that was published in the January 1999 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*.¹¹ Alongside the current of public attention on the Qur’an, inside of Qur’anic scholarship there are plenty of examples of a new direction for approaching the text. The work of Angelika Neuwirth, Neal Robinson,

¹⁰Ibid, p. 7.

¹¹A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur’an in Context*, p. 1.

Rosalind Ward Gwynne, and Mustansir Mir (among others) illustrates an approach to the Qur'an that focuses on the text as a literary work in its own right and not one that requires a study of earlier and later textual traditions to understand the ways in which the Qur'an makes its own unique religious claims.¹²

All works of literature include a voice which is reflective of its initial social and historical dynamic. A deeper and broader understanding of a literary work is achieved by connecting the voice of a text (or the unique way in which a narrative unfolds) with its initial environment. This study accepts that the Qur'an emerged out of the seventh century Arabian social dynamic depicted in the life of Muhammad. While this premise is accepted and relevant to a study of the Qur'an, it is not the focus of this study.

Scholarship on Qur'anic Prophets

Although the early traditional western scholars used problematic methodological approaches, their comparative textual analysis introduced the notion that the Qur'an as text did not emerge from a historical and sociological vacuum. Rather than understanding the Qur'an, simply, as the beginning of Islamic religious history, Geiger's approach allowed for the Qur'an to be seen as a "transitional text" which came out of an environment that was religiously rich and culturally diverse.¹³ From this perspective, the Qur'anic text interacted with its initial environment by adopting, modifying, and relaying themes, characters, and narratives that would have been familiar to its initial audience.

¹²See Mustansir Mir, "Some Figures of Speech in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Autumn 2008), pp. 31-48; Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Neil Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004); and Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an* (London: RoutledgeCruzon, 2004).

¹³A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context*, p. 5.

The nature of Qur’anic recollections of past prophets makes it clear that the text’s initial social setting was familiar with these stories. Sydney Griffith explains that the Qur’an has an “unspoken and pervasive confidence that its audience is thoroughly familiar with the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets.”¹⁴ Inside of the Qur’an, the best evidence for the audience’s acquaintance with the biblical stories is that “there is no need for even the most rudimentary form of introduction.”¹⁵ The Qur’an shares prophetic stories not with the intention of conveying new information, but with the goal of reminding its audience about known material (albeit, material with updated claims).

While the initial environment of the Qur’an was familiar with the biblical prophetic material, the role of prophetic speech is more conspicuous in the Qur’an. In part, the prominence of dialogue in the Qur’an is evident with the reliance on attributed speech, rather than narration, as a preferred method to tell the stories of past prophets. In agreement with Griffith, Angelika Neuwirth states that early Qur’anic listeners recognized prophetic figures and stories from oral narrations and traditions.¹⁶ Moreover, Neuwirth notices that the Qur’an and Bible share many characteristics. Yet, the sharpest difference between the Qur’an and the Bible is that the Qur’an’s literary features, characters, and stories are spread across the textual units of the *surahs*.¹⁷ Another importance difference between the Qur’an and the Bible is the pervasiveness of prophetic speech. In the Bible there are sections where dialogue is more apparent and those where it is less evident, but in the Qur’an prophetic speech is continually found with the persuasive call to the Qur’anic reader, or listener, to accept its claim on religious truth.¹⁸

¹⁴Sydney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 57.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁶Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), p. 621.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 595.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 597.

Stretching across Qur'anic *surahs*, dialogue is perhaps the most overt feature that appears in the prophetic stories. Recognizable biblical prophets are utilized constantly in the Qur'an through attributed dialogue as a means to make religious claims.

Awareness that the initial environment of the Qur'an was rife with biblical knowledge does not mean that the contemporary specialist or scholar has to deconstruct the Qur'an into narrative units that show correspondence with earlier Jewish or Christian texts. Instead, it means that the Qur'an made use of the material which its audience would have found most familiar as a means to construct "its own peculiar theological agenda and literary logic."¹⁹ In particular, the Qur'anic references to earlier religious texts and histories served a rhetorical purpose of illustrating underlying thematic concerns woven throughout the Qur'anic discourse. The most overt way in which the Qur'an refers to past texts and religious traditions is through the recitation of the prophetic stories. A study of the role that the prophetic stories (as one of the more prevalent and poignant expressions of 'Biblical material' in the Qur'an) play in the Qur'an provides a starting point to reveal how the Qur'an uses a particular narrative to develop its unique agenda and logic.

Gabriel Said Reynolds describes the literary style of the Qur'an as "allusive" because it is "part of a dynamic and complicated literary tradition" filled with shared motifs and themes.²⁰ This allusive style affirms the literary nature of the Qur'an. Writing about the literary nature of the Bible, Robert Alter asserts that allusion "is not an embellishment but a fundamental necessity of literary expression" because a literary work cannot ignore the texts that came before it.²¹ Rather, a piece of literature will appropriate, develop, or transform material from a surrounding

¹⁹A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context*, p. 13.

²⁰Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 36.

²¹Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (London: SPCK, 1992), pp. 107-108.

body of literary discourse. As a consequence of this process, a text becomes a participant in a larger literary tradition.

A student of the Qur'an should recognize the conversation that connects the Qur'an with earlier religious texts and, as Reynolds writes, "in particular to its intimate conversation with Biblical literature."²² To read the Qur'an means that we must be alert to this "subtext of traditions."²³ With this awareness, the Qur'an "should not be read in conversation with what came after it (*tafsir*) but with what came before it (Biblical literature)."²⁴ We do not have to focus on historical questions of intellectual 'borrowing' or uncovering textual sources to acknowledge that the Qur'an can be read fruitfully "in the light of Biblical literature."²⁵ This is because it is evident that the Qur'an presumes that its initial audience has familiarity with biblical figures and themes. By moving past an interest of origins of biblical material, a study focusing on how the Qur'an uses biblical characters becomes a literary work rather than a historical one. The experiences and attributed dialogue of the Qur'anic prophets (all of whom, with the exception of Muhammad, are from the biblical tradition) may be connected to a larger literary tradition outside of the text.

The Qur'an makes careful use of its recollections of biblical histories. It will remind its readers about biblical stories as they "fit the paradigm of its prophetology, and it edits the narratives where necessary to fit the pattern."²⁶ According to Griffith, this distinctive Islamic 'prophetology' refers to "a series of 'messengers' and 'prophets' sent by God to warn human communities, which 'messengers' and 'prophets' God protects from the machinations of their

²² Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, p. 36.

²³Ibid, p. 4.

²⁴Ibid, p. 16.

²⁵Ibid, p. 22.

²⁶Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 3.

adversaries.”²⁷ Another central element, or perhaps the central element, of the described prophetic experiences is that they are seen in relation to the life of Muhammad. The parameters inside of which the Qur’an presents retelling of many biblical figures are based on “an apologetic typology in support of Muhammad’s mission.”²⁸ The accounts of the biblical prophets serve the agenda of the Qur’an by showing how its message, as reflected through the prophetic career of Muhammad, continues the established covenantal relationship. In as much as there is intertextual agreement regarding the prophetic characters, recalling biblical prophet stories indicates a relationship where the Qur’an also authenticates the religious truth declared in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

As described below, every individual that the Qur’an designates as prophet, or *nabī*, comes from the biblical tradition. Griffith, however, states that there is a divide between the viewpoints of the sacred texts of the prophet. From his view, on one hand, the Qur’anic prophets “reiterate an unchanging message, which their subsequent communities inevitably distort.” On the other hand, from the biblical outlook “the prophets bear an often judgmental witness to current events in salvation history, often with a Messianic anticipation attached.”²⁹ In fact, the division between the prophets of the Qur’an and the prophets of the Bible are not this strict. Noah in the Qur’an, for example, bears witness to the disbelief in his community and responds with condemnatory rhetoric. Moreover, while the messianic component of the Qur’an may be debated, Neuwirth explains that speech in the Qur’an should be understood as “apocalyptic language.”³⁰ Whether there are messianic anticipations or not in the Qur’an, there are

²⁷Ibid, p. 3.

²⁸Ibid, p. 71.

²⁹Ibid, p. 63.

³⁰Angelika Neuwirth, “Qur’anic literary structure revisited: *Sūrat al-Rahmān* between mythic account and decodation of myth,” *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. Stefan Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), pp. 388-420, esp. p. 391.

apocalyptic expectations. In this way, we see a strong connection and continuity between the Qur'anic and biblical views of prophets.

Geiger's (and later Richard Bell's) claim that Muhammad made use of earlier biblical stories as a means to state his message clearly has enduring benefit for current approaches to the Qur'an. The socio-rhetorical study presented here, however, replaces Geiger's assumption that Muhammad authored the Qur'an, and the need to find his intentions hidden between the verses. Rather, it presumes that the framework of the Qur'an reveals itself as one which uses prophetic stories and their distinct personalities as a means to elucidate overarching themes and to present central claims in the Qur'an.

While there has been a fair amount of scholarship on the Qur'anic prophets, little has been said about their role in presenting central Qur'anic claims and even less has been written about the Qur'anic depictions of prophetic personalities. Geiger's study of the Qur'an (mentioned above) not only initiated Qur'anic scholarship in the west, but it also provided an early study on the prophets in the Qur'an. Of course, his interest in the Qur'anic prophets revolved around showing their connection to Jewish literary tradition. More recent studies on Qur'anic prophets are not driven by a concern with the origin of material. Rather, they focus on listing the instances of prophetic stories. For instances, in his book, *Prophets in the Qur'an: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, Brannon Wheeler compiles instances of Qur'anic passages and exegetical traditions about the prophets. This a helpful introduction to the prophetic material in Islamic tradition, but it does not take the next step and analyze the significance of the collected material.

However, there are some scholarly studies that develop the role of prophecy by discussing its larger purpose in the Qur'an. For example, in his book, *Biblical Prophets in the*

Qur'an and Muslim Literature, Roberto Tottoli characterizes the Qur'an's prophetic tales as 'punishment stories' that served as, both, a warning and an encouragement during the Meccan period (he does not follow Nöldeke's division of three Meccan periods) of Muhammad's mission. In addition, the trials and tribulations of these biblical prophets are presented in such a manner that they mirror the obstacles in Muhammad's prophetic career (not the other way around, as has been suggested by works such as John Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies*). More than that, in an approach that hearkens back to Geiger's contention that Muhammad only used 'Jewish legends' as they served to 'edify' his message, Tottoli explains that the Qur'an has a tendency to use only the portions of prophetic stories that serve the purpose of elucidating the Qur'an's moral message (while Geiger's assertion is flavored by obvious polemical and positivistic assumptions, the continued significance of his assessment of the value of prophetic stories in the Qur'an should not be so easily dismissed). Tottoli does, therefore, offer a good overview of the purpose of the Qur'an's prophetic stories. Yet, the discussion of these punishment stories could be developed by addressing how they serve the homiletic type of discourse that is so frequently associated with Biblical prophets in the Qur'an.

With this in mind, Haleem offers a broader perspective of the function of prophecy in the Qur'an. Specifically, his article, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," (discussed below) mentions the notion that Noah is often categorized as the primary prophet of punishment. In response to this broad categorization, Haleem notes correctly that it would be a reductionist reading of the Qur'an to claim that Noah's story is simply about punishment.³¹ This same concern of reductionism can be applied to the general role of prophecy.

³¹M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2006), pp. 38-57, esp. p. 38.

In his book, *Muhammad and the Quran*, Rafiq Zakaria extends the significance of prophecy beyond the threat of punishment for the unbelievers. For instance, Zakaria shows that developed prophetic figures, like Moses, may be used to offer moral instruction and to make theological claims.³² Writing about the broader subject of prophecy in the Qur'an, Marilyn Waldman (in her book *Prophecy and Power: Muhammad and the Qur'an in the Light of Comparison*) asserts that prophecy is part of the Qur'anic emphasis on remembrance of past agreements, or covenants, with God.³³ From this view, the stories of the prophets serve as reminders for correct guidance and worship.

However, it is the work of Mustansir Mir that offers the most developed approach to the importance of prophecy in the Qur'an. In particular, Mir's scholarship on dialogue in the Qur'an works from the premise that prophetic dialogue serves to develop distinct personalities, while also indicating the overarching claims of the texts and progressing the Qur'anic narrative. Mohammad Hussain Fadhlullah's book *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue* (translated from the Arabic title, *al-Hiwar fil Qur'an*) looks at Qur'anic dialogue as a model for "what the Muslim activists go through out of incessant spiritual concern for others."³⁴ This is part of a larger goal of his work, which looks to convert an audience without generating a negative response.³⁵ In this way, Fadhlullah's study is different from the work of Mir which looks at Qur'anic dialogue as a means to show narrative cohesion, character development, and overarching textual claims. With that in mind, the focus of this project is more in line with Mir's work.

³²Rafiq Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 348.

³³Marilyn Waldman, *Prophecy and Power: Muhammad and the Qur'an in the Light of Comparison* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2013), p. 103.

³⁴Mohammad Hussain Fadhlullah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*, trans. Najim al-Khafaji (Beirut: Dar Almalak, 2003), p. 16.

³⁵Ibid, pp. 16 and 18.

Qur'an as Literature

By discussing the nature of dialogue in the Qur'an, we are approaching the Qur'anic text as literature. Addressing the Qur'an as a work of literature does not mean that one has to diminish its divine nature or make the claim that it is a work of man. Rather, to consider the Qur'an as a work of literature implies that it is a text that can be shown to have a general sense of cohesion in its presentation of central topics, overall themes, and general narrative.³⁶ Carl Ernst proposes that reading the Qur'an in the fashion of literature means considering the text as one that can be understood through its structure and style.³⁷ Issa Boullata writes that there are many elements of literary structure inside of the Qur'an; they include "diction, phonology, morphology, syntax, rhythm, rhetoric, composition, and style."³⁸ Additionally, literature is characterized by a distinct voice and by its use of symbolism, allegory, and imagery, "which are set within a historic epistemology and cultural ambiance."³⁹ In Islamic tradition it is said that the Qur'an has an inimitable voice, or message. In fact, in a number of instances the Qur'an refers to its own inimitability (*i'jaz*) by challenging its audience to produce a similar body of work.⁴⁰ The distinctiveness of the Qur'an is the way in which it uses the listed literary structural elements and develops them with its rich use of imagery and symbolism.

To develop its distinctive voice and make its claim on inimitability, the Qur'an uses what may be referred to as *balāghah* ("eloquence"), or rhetoric, as a means to lend strength to textual discourse.⁴¹ Most notably, the Qur'anic usage of prophetic dialogue strengthens the text's

³⁶For more on the nature of the Qur'an as a work of literature with a sense of cohesion refer to Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'an as Literature," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 1, The Literature of Islam (Spring, 1988), pp. 49-64.

³⁷Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 205.

³⁸Issa J Boullata, *Literary Structure of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (London:Routledge, 2009), p. x.

³⁹*Ibid*, p. x.

⁴⁰Q 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88, and 52:34.

⁴¹Mustansir Mir, "Between Grammar and Rhetoric (*Balāghah*): A Look at Qur'ān 2:217," *Islamic Studies*, Volume 29, No. 3 (1990), pp. 277-285.

narrative agenda because it puts central claims in the spoken words of literary figures (prophets) who were revered and respected in the initial social environment of the Qur'an. Rather than making an abstract assertion with weak means of evidence for support, this dialogue utilizes concrete references to specific situational circumstances of past prophets. As a consequence of these allusions to past prophetic characters and situations, the dialogue from the prophets of the past have a rhetorical purpose in the Qur'an; they give forceful and persuasive logic to the Qur'an's claim on religious truth.

The Qur'anic significance of dialogue extends beyond theological claims and into the literary realm. By addressing the Qur'an as literature, one may become alert to certain literary features (e.g., thematic repetition, central topics, narrative developments, and the presentation of principal characters). Specifically, topics are noticeable because of their recurrence across the text. Central topics of the Qur'an, like monotheism, Day of Judgment, covenant, and prophecy, reflect the issues that were significant to the initial cultural context of the Qur'an. Through attributed dialogue, characters speak to the textual audience regarding the Qur'an's central issues. A study of dialogue as a literary form in the Qur'an is a way to study the Qur'an as literature, and allows speaking central characters to offer insights into the topics of the text.

While many literary interpretations may conflate or confuse theme and topic, there should be a careful differentiation between the two. A topic is what a story, or work of literature, is about. A theme is a universal message or lesson inside of a given text. From the Greek word *topos* and the Latin word *locus*, "a topic was a general head or line of argument which suggested material from which proofs could be made."⁴² In the case of the Qur'an, the primary topic is

⁴²"Aristotle distinguished two kinds of topics: (1) the special topics (he called them *idioi topoi* or *eide*); (2) the common topics (*koinoi topoi*)" (Edward P.J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student: Third Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 24.).

prophecy. Throughout the text, the sheer repetition of this vocational experience and character indicates its centrality. A number of topics and themes are surrounding, describing, and proceeding from this primary topic. Other topics that appear include monotheism and Day of Judgment. Yet, it is the topic of covenant that is central to the presentation of prophetic continuity (as described below). These four topics recur across the Qur'an and they can be understood as the topical focus of the text.

While the topics of prophecy, covenant, monotheism, and Day of Judgment are the topics that appear across the text, there are additional topics that can be located inside of specific situations of prophetic dialogue. These situational topics should not be seen as distinct from the larger topics. Rather, the situational topics serve to support and elucidate the larger topics. For instance, the central topic of prophecy is exhibited and developed through the topic of prophetic genealogy. As discussed below, the Qur'an states clearly who is included in the family of the prophets. The Qur'an talks about its prophets coming from a specific lineage (*dhurriyya*).⁴³ Inclusion in this family redefines traditional pre-Islamic Arab notions of familial and tribal identity.

Along the lines of genealogy, the prophetic character is made more robust through the presentation of the topic of the father-son relationship. While the generally held belief is that there is a good order from father to son, the Qur'an calls into question this order and redefines traditional assumptions about family relationships. A shifting notion of the accepted father-son relationship is seen most clearly in the Noah narrative and the dialogical instances of Abraham. To a lesser extent, this topic appears in the story of Moses as well. The Qur'anic topics of genealogy and the father-son relationship shift assumptions about familial relations and serve to

⁴³Q 37:77.

develop the topic of prophecy, along with the topics of covenant, Day of Judgment, and monotheism.

The designation of these four central topics (i.e., prophecy, covenant, monotheism, and Day of Judgment) is similar to Abdul-Raof's assertion that "the four major tenets of faith" are "monotheism, prophethood, eschatology, and reward and punishment."⁴⁴ While he agrees about the centrality of monotheism and prophecy, Abdul-Raof does not mention the significance of covenant and he lists eschatology and reward and punishment in lieu of Day of Judgment. However, the final destination of your soul and reward or punishment for your actions are addressed on the Qur'anic Day of Judgment. In this way, it appears that Abdul-Raof is discussing similar topics when writing about these major tenets of faith.

Each of these four topics serves a specific function. Prophecy is a testimonial topic, which is based on the authority of past prophets who serve as witnesses to the truthfulness of their message. Covenant can be understood as a topic of legal precedence because it focuses on previous contractual agreements from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament to substantiate its religious claims. At the center of the Qur'an's religious claim is an assertion about the supernatural topic of God's monotheism. The Day of Judgment is a topic of circumstance because it offers possible options for the pending future and it is meant to encourage a behavior of belief, while discouraging disbelief. To support this topic there are recurring references to past occasions of Day of Judgment as a means to support the assumption that this event may be repeated in a future that is similar to historical situations.⁴⁵ All of these topics are developed in such a manner as they serve the agenda of the Qur'an.

⁴⁴Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Stylistics: A Linguistic Analysis* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2004), p. 204.

⁴⁵This explanation of Qur'anic topics uses the concept of common topics as found in Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*. Trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books Classical Library, 2005) and Cicero, *Topica*, Trans. Tobias Reinhard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Along with these four central topics, a number of themes emerge from the topic of prophecy. As discussed throughout this dissertation, they include the following: allegiance to faith over family, punishment for the unbelievers, mercy and reward for the believers, faith in God over desire for material wealth, the limited power of humans contrasted against the seemingly unlimited power of God, continuity in the prophetic message, and a community's reluctance to accept a prophet's message. More particularly, some of the overarching themes that are most noticeable in the dialogues of Noah and Solomon are the following: tension between a prophet and his community (Q 11: 25-39; 23:23-5; 26:105-116; 54:9; 71:1-24), punishment for not heeding the prophetic warning (Q 7:61-4; 11:39-41; 71:25-7), belief in God over familial connection (Q 11:42-8), God's power (Q 38:35-9), and belief in God over material pursuits (Q 38:32-5). The most overt way to locate these topics and themes is through repetition. The Qur'an reminds its readers repeatedly what the text is about and the lessons it is looking to impart.

Similar to Mustansir Mir (discussed below), Boullata builds on the work of Alter in the *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Part of approaching a sacred text as a literary work means "leaving aside for the moment the question of its status as a divine communication."⁴⁶ Moving beyond a concern for divine authenticity does not mean dismissing the text's religious claims. This is because, as Boullata asserts, awareness of a sacred text's literary features helps enable an understanding of the way in which a literary structure produces religious meaning.⁴⁷ Instead of delegitimizing or limiting the religiosity of the text, approaching the Qur'an as a work of literature allows for a better view of principal Qur'anic assertions, arguments, and themes.

⁴⁶Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, p. 216.

⁴⁷Boullata, *Literary Structure of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, p. xii.

Inside of the text, it is through the speaking prophet that the Qur’anic audience learns of the major topics, central of which is prophecy and the covenant that the prophet brings from God to human. Continuing with the series of covenants in the Hebrew Bible, and the notion of the new covenant mentioned in the Gospels, the Qur’an informs its audience that the covenant remains intact.⁴⁸ The duty of the Qur’anic prophet is to offer the choice between keeping and breaking this covenant. In this way, the prophetic assignment represents the Qur’anic mission of providing ethical and theological instruction.

Inside of the Qur’an, moral education is a central duty of the narrative. By its own description, the Qur’an is a collection of revelations that serve as “a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong).”⁴⁹ It is a guide that provides humans with the division between correct and incorrect action. Additionally, the Qur’an makes the claim that it came from Allah, as it “is not such as could ever be invented despite of Allah.”⁵⁰ Before this divine guidance was revealed to Muhammad, this Qur’an was narrated to the Israelites.⁵¹ Central to the Qur’an are the Qur’anic prophets who stretch from the beginnings of Israelite history to the character of Muhammad.⁵² Tasked with delivering the uniform message of monotheism, these prophets provide access to the dominant ideas inside of the text. However, with the prophetic stories stretching across the Qur’an it can be difficult to locate the central Qur’anic claims and topics.

Mir has written that the way in which the Qur’anic voice jumps from one subject to another is a discursive style that can be referred to as *taṣrīf*. According to Mir “*taṣrīf* means

⁴⁸Along with the New Covenant, the Noahic, Ahrhamic, and Mosiac are discussed in chapter two.

⁴⁹Q 2:185 (Unless otherwise noted, the translation utilized is from Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall).

⁵⁰Q 10:37.

⁵¹Q 27:76.

⁵²See Q 42:13.

‘change, alteration, variegation.’ In the Qur’an, *taṣrīf* is used to refer to the varied patterns of the movement of winds and clouds (2:164 and 45:5), and also to refer to the diverse ways in which the Divine message is presented in different places in the scripture (6:46, 65, 105; 7:58; 17:89; 18:54; 20:113; 46:27).⁵³ As a narrative principle in the Qur’an, this means that prophetic stories, for example, may appear differently when they are used in different *surahs*. This does not mean that the attempt to develop a cohesive understanding of the Qur’an should be abandoned.

Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation and the Utility of Repetition

Socio-rhetorical interpretation, introduced by Vernon Robbins in the field of New Testament studies, offers methodological tools that help to locate and describe the general “forest” of the Qur’an, rather than primarily staring at individual “trees.”⁵⁴ That is, socio-rhetorical interpretation examines how specific language is used in particular ways throughout the text to develop underlying topics woven into the fabric of the narrative. Inside of this mode of textual investigation, there is a specific focus on the inner texture of a given sacred text.

The inner texture of a text refers to the various ways the text employs language to communicate. This includes various types of linguistic patterns within a text (progressive and repetitive textures), structural elements of a text (narrational and opening-middle-closing texture) the specific manner a text attempts to persuade its reader (argumentative

⁵³Mustansir Mir, “Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur’an,” *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, Roberta Sabbath, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009) pp. 93-106, esp. p. 97.

⁵⁴Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996).

texture) and the way the language of a text evokes feelings, emotions, or senses that are located in different parts of the body (sensory-aesthetic texture)⁵⁵

Some aspects of inner texture communicative tools, and the ways in which they demonstrate the development of these prophetic personalities, are addressed below in the overview of all speaking Qur'anic prophets found in chapter three. Once we locate communicative tools inside of prophetic dialogue, there emerge certain patterns in the inner texture that can be used to draw attention to central topics and themes in the text.

With the particular focus that this project places on the dialogue of Noah and Solomon, we see that the frequency of these prophets' appearance in the Qur'an (Noah, in particular) is an indication of their centrality to the Qur'anic message and the overarching claims that stretch across *surahs*. Noah appears in the following *surahs*: 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 29, 33, 37, 38, 40, 42, 50, 51, 53, 54, 57, 66, and 71. Although Solomon is a much less frequent character in the text, he can be found in the following *surahs*: 2, 4, 6, 21, 27, 34, and 38. Across the Qur'anic *surahs*, attributed dialogue fuses prophetic appearances with a narrative purpose of delivering central ideas. By focusing on prophetic dialogue, the reader achieves insight into how the Qur'anic depictions of prophetic experiences serve to tie the Qur'an together and illustrate the text's underlying arguments.

In particular, the repetition of prophetic experiences is the starkest way to locate the main themes, topics, and assertions of the Qur'an. Ironically, an individual known for his embellishment perhaps summarizes this idea best. Ayatollah Khomeini, speaking about the most often mentioned prophet (and individual), Moses, in the Qur'an, states:

⁵⁵From the definition of "Inner Texture" at the following URL:
http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/i_defns.cfm#inner

Above all else, we must study the Qur'an; the Qur'an has given us instructions for everything and made clear what our duties are... Why does the Qur'an repeat the story of Moses (peace be upon him) so frequently? Is it just meant to be an entertaining story? If the Qur'an wanted to tell us a story, once would be enough. So what is the purpose behind the Qur'an's insistence on repeating the story of Moses and his opposition to the Pharaoh? To make us understand?⁵⁶

Although Khomeini uses the story of Moses as part of his rhetoric against the late Shah of Iran, he still, nonetheless, makes an evenhanded claim about the value of repetition of prophetic stories. Through the repetition, the Qur'anic reader is reminded, again and again, of the central themes and recurring topics and, therefore, grasps a better understanding of the underlying argument of the text.

The importance of reminding through repetition is not confined to the text of the Qur'an. Extending the concept of repetition into theology generally, Marilyn Waldman writes that since "it is their natural forgetfulness that allows humans to make mistakes, the remedy for the human condition is mindfulness and guidance. The more specific the guidance, the more likely correct behavior will ensue."⁵⁷ In the Qur'anic narrative, a reminder is a central motif that extends Islamic social and cultural elements. Along these lines, Waldman writes:

⁵⁶Hamid Algar, trans., *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)* (North Haledon, NJ: Mizan Press, 1991), p. 246.

⁵⁷Waldman, *Prophecy and Power*, p. 103.

One could even say that being reminded (*dhikr*) is one of the key motifs of all Islamic culture. Muslims are reminded by Qur'anic quotations on the walls of mosques, by frequent quoting of Hadith or Qur'an, and by having a clear and detailed path, Shari'ah, to follow. Shari'ah, like many sacred institutions, is conceived of as a way to help human beings overcome, though not erase, an inborn limitation. This reminding is considered all the more necessary because of the most important things that humans tend to forget is being born muslim and what that entails.⁵⁸

Inside of the Qur'an, repetitive reminders are most often associated with the stories of past prophets that reach across different sections of the Qur'anic text. These prophetic stories also reach across sacred texts by providing a repetition of biblical prophets' call to follow the covenant and the warning of not abiding by its tenets. These stories are not meant to provide new information. Rather, prophetic narrative units are meant to remind readers what they already know, but have since forgotten.

A study focused on prophetic stories draws the reader's attention to the literary qualities inside of the text. In accordance with the interpretive strategies of the socio-rhetorical approach, the main focus of this study of prophets is to work with the inner textures of the Qur'an. The inner texture of a given text may be located in language features such as word repetition and dialogue. Textual studies will often focus on individual words to deduce meaning from a text. Rather than interpreting meaning from a single word, inner textual analysis "focuses on words as tools for communication" and analyzes how words form communicative structures such as patterns.⁵⁹ The identification of these structures allows the interpreter to better understand the

⁵⁸Ibid, pp. 103-104.

⁵⁹Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 7.

general context of meaning within the text before investigating the meaning of a specific word or verse.

Many textual studies skip this initial step, but Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation begins with inner textual analysis, or looking within the text to see the ways in which the text explains itself. The socio-rhetorical approach identifies six types of inner texture: “(a) repetitive; (b) progressive; (c) narrational; (d) opening-middle-closing; (e) argumentative; and (f) sensory-aesthetic texture.”⁶⁰ Repetitive texture refers to “the occurrence of words and phrases more than once in a unit.” In the case of the discursive style of the Qur’an, repetition has particular importance because it provides a view of the rhetorical movements that occur inside a given discourse.⁶¹ Writing about the Qur’an, Salwa El-Awa writes:

At a superficial level, repetition is merely saying the same thing again, so how could it be argued that repetition makes any addition to the contextual effect or reduction to the processing effort, if all that it does is to add to the utterance the processed things that have presumably been processed before?⁶²

Robbins, however, shows that from repetition texture one can locate progressive texture which is a sequence, or progression, “of words and phrases throughout the unit [inside a given text].”⁶³ In agreement with Robbins, Hussein Abdul-Raof writes that the function of repetition is textual progression and unification.⁶⁴ By locating repetition on a micro level, a close reader may locate

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 7.

⁶¹Ibid, p. 8.

⁶²Salwa El-Awa, “Repetition in the Qur’an: A Relevance Based Explanation of the Phenomenon,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter 2003), pp. 577-593, esp. 582.

⁶³Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁴Abdul-Raof, *Qur’anic Stylistics*, p. 194.

the way in which a given words (or words) progresses inside of a text. On a macro level, readers may notice that repeated characters and stories develop across a text.

In his work on the Bible as literature, Robert Alter constructs a scale of repetitive features that range from “the smallest and most unitary elements to the largest and most composite ones.”⁶⁵ The smallest element that may be located through repetition is the *Leitwort*, which “is a word or word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts.”⁶⁶ One is able to grasp the broader meaning of a given word by locating its repetitive usage. The next feature is a motif. While a motif will often be associated with a *Leitwort*, a motif will only have meaning when put in the context of a narrative. Inside of a narrative a motif may be a recurring physical image or a sensory quality. More developed than a motif, a theme is an “idea which is part of the value-system of the narrative - it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal, political, historiosophical, theological - is made evident in some recurring pattern.”⁶⁷ A theme may be associated to a *Leitwort* or a motif. Inside of a narrative, we can locate what Alter refers to as a “sequence of actions” that is common feature of a folk tale where there is usually a repetitive sequence of three actions that result in a climax. Although it is not bound by the smaller elements, a type-scene may be marked by a recurrent word or phrase and it is generally associated with repetitive themes. More specifically, a type-scene is “an episode occurring at a portentous moment in the career of the hero,” and it may include “a fixed sequence of motifs.”⁶⁸ The common component of the elements of a *Leitwort*, motif, theme, sequence of actions, and type-scene is repetition. It is through the texture of repetition that we are able to

⁶⁵Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *A Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990), p. 94.

⁶⁶Ibid, p. 92.

⁶⁷Ibid, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁸Ibid, pp. 93-94.

identify these features and see how they progress across the larger narrative. Of particular focus in this study is the way in which a type-scene is reflected in the repeated stories of the prophets.

Repetition occurs on small and large levels. In his work on the Qur'an, Abdul-Raof explains that repetition in the Qur'an appears in four types. There is repetition of words, repetition of a formula for exhortation, repetition of motifs, and repetition of parables.⁶⁹ According to Abdul-Raof, the different forms of repetition may indicate a specific purpose inside of the textual agenda. For example, repetition of a formula for exhortation is used for exhortation and rhetorical emphasis, while repetition of motifs emphasizes sequentiality and conceptual connections.⁷⁰ Most relevant to this study is the repetition of parables, which refers to the repeated stories of the prophets.⁷¹ However, all of these forms of repetition inside of the Qur'an are useful for narrative understanding because they have a function of building textual cohesion and aiding textual progression.

Through the initial analysis of progressive and repetition textures it is possible to find the larger pattern that is narrational texture, which can be understood as a "configured environment of actions and responses that move the narrative forward."⁷² This texture

resides in voices...through which the words in texts speak...The narrator may begin and continue simply with "narration"; the narrator may introduce people (characters) who act (the narrator describes their action); the narrator may introduce people who speak (they

⁶⁹Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Stylistics*, pp. 195-204.

⁷⁰Ibid, pp. 198 and 203.

⁷¹Ibid, p. 204.

⁷²Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 13.

themselves become ‘narrators’ or ‘speaking actors’); the narrator may introduce ‘written texts’ that speak (like Old Testament scripture).⁷³

A text may speak through third person narration, the actions of described people, dialogue attributed to a character, or through the recitation of an outside tradition. Inside of narrational texture, there may be a type of attributed dialogue that frequently appears and points to a pattern that offers a better view of that section of the text. By and large, this is the case with the Qur’an. The textures of “repetition, progression, and narration regularly work together to indicate the opening, middle, and closing of a unit of text.”⁷⁴ While the tripartite outline of opening-middle-closing is a moving target with boundaries that shift based on perspective and opinion, it is a design that allows an approachable understanding for the argumentative texture of a given text. To build on this, “argumentative texture investigates multiple kinds of inner reasoning in the discourse.” The reasoning may be logical, or it “may be described as qualitative.”⁷⁵ The qualitative form of argumentation can appear “when the quality of the images and descriptions encourages the reader to accept the portrayal as true and real.”⁷⁶ An account of ancient testimony (from a revered character out of a past tradition) provides one of the richest qualitative, and most persuasive, types of argument. Recitation of attributed speech often develops into sensory-aesthetic texture which “resides prominently in the range of senses the text evokes or embodies (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell) and the manner in which the text evokes or embodies them (reason, intuition, imagination, humor, etc.).” There are, however, occurrences when “the discourse may be so rich and vivid that it evokes images as full and

⁷³Ibid, p. 15.

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 19.

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 21.

⁷⁶Ibid, p. 21.

dramatic as cinema.”⁷⁷ This is the case for much of the Qur’an’s prophetic dialogue, where robust character development through conversation allows for the construction of mental imagery. Yet, the dialogue of prophets in the Qur’an provides fertile ground for exploring all of the mentioned textures.

Repetition, progression, and narration textures offer methods that serve to provide a better understanding of the Qur’an’s use of prophetic dialogue. Between dialogical occurrences in separate *surahs*, repeated words or claims point to recurring topics and themes that unify the larger argument of the text. Inside of a *surah*, repetition in dialogue is a means to progress a central idea or claim. One of the primary types of narrational texture in the Qur’an is ascribing speech to prophetic character, a study of which does much to showcase the preferred Qur’anic method of dramatic storytelling.

The Qur’an will often develop a narrative account with opening-middle-closing texture. A *surah* will frequently open by mentioning a contested issue. To address this issue, the Qur’an often offers its perspective through an appeal to spoken language from a revered prophet. The imagery of testimony from past prophets does much to make argumentative texture as real as possible and provides a setting of verbal exchanges that can be described as cinematic within the parameters of sensory-aesthetic texture. It will close the tripartite design of opening-middle-closing texture by revisiting the opening issue, but it will utilize the described story (with the account of dialogue at its center) as evidence for its claim on the disputed issue. In other instances, the opening-middle-closing texture may appear inside of a given instance of prophetic dialogue and it will indicate the narrative arc of a prophetic story. These layers of inner textures

⁷⁷Ibid, p. 30.

are an opportune series of windows through which to view the way in which Qur'anic dialogue is utilized in the Qur'an.

Among these textures, repetition may be the most accessible and easily located. In her article, "Repetition in the Qur'an: A Relevance Based Explanation of the Phenomenon," Salwa El-Awa locates four major types of repetition. The first is "Exact Immediate" repetition, where words or linguistic units are in immediate repetition.⁷⁸ While this is not extremely common in the Qur'an, there are some examples.⁷⁹ Immediate repetition puts emphasis on a particular subject and indicates the expression of importance that the speaker, in this case the Qur'an, places on that subject.⁸⁰ Beyond indicating what the speaker thinks is important, immediate repetition also indicates the speaker's general attitude toward a subject and the way in which this information could be received in its initial social context. Moreover, repetition may indicate emphasis or "strength of action."⁸¹

The second type of repetition is referred to as "Exact Delayed," which "occurs when the speaker repeats his own words after the occurrence of intervening linguistic items."⁸² This is a prominent type of repetition in the Qur'an. For example, this form of repetition is the prominent feature in *surah 97*.

[I]t gives access to information mentioned earlier about the same item, and indicates the relation between various, sometimes consecutive, paragraphs/sections of the text. In a text like the Qur'an which is read repeatedly by Muslims, this process works both

⁷⁸El-Awa, "Repetition in the Qur'an," p. 279.

⁷⁹Q 89:21-22 is an example of repetition of words and Q 94:5-6 is an example of repetition of linguistic units.

⁸⁰El-Awa, "Repetition in the Qur'an," p. 584.

⁸¹Ibid, p. 585.

⁸²Ibid, p. 279.

forwards and backwards. It works forwards in a first reading, and backwards with each subsequent reading, when the reader will have gathered more information about repeated items. As a result, when an item is mentioned for the first time in the text, instead of being treated as a first occurrence it will be processed as a repeated item, and will therefore have the communicative effect of repetition, giving access to all the information that is possible to recall from previous readings, and so on and so forth, with cumulative effect.⁸³

In this way, time is not unidirectional and the text is not read in just one direction. Repeated words, whether they be exact (mentioned above) or paraphrased (mentioned below), put a text in conversation with itself. Beginning with any section of the Qur'an, the appearance of repeated words, stories, and concepts link a given portion of the narrative with that which came before and which comes later. This Qur'anic style of connecting ideas through repetition indicates a similarity with the Talmudic dictum: There is no “‘before’ or ‘after’ in Torah.”⁸⁴ This synthetic system of reading creates a perspective where the vast body of the sacred text is filled with details that provide the reader with numerous details and related insights on the text's central insights. Through repetition, one locates the recurring style through which the text conveys its most fundamental messages.

The third type of repetition, “Paraphrase Immediate,” refers to “when the same proposition is expressed in different words. Communication and recovery of the same

⁸³Ibid, p. 587.

⁸⁴Talmud Pesahim 6b quoted in Barry W. Holtz, ed. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), p. 35.

proposition in this case can be by the explicit verbal expression, or by inference.”⁸⁵ According to El-Awa, the Qur’an does not include examples of this repetitive delivery of information.

However, the fourth type of repetition, which El-Awa calls “Delayed Paraphrase,” is perhaps the most common in the Qur’an and, certainly, the most relevant to this particular study.

It occurs in numerous occurrences of themes, or particular historical material (e.g. the story of the Children of Israel, stories of the Prophets and of past nations, etc.) where one occurrence includes information that has been overlooked is mentioned briefly in another occurrence of the topic, mainly due to focusing on different aspects of it in each occurrence.⁸⁶

The various stories of past prophets that occur across the text will be repeated with slight variances, character details, or narratives elaborations.

The delay of paraphrased repetition around prophetic stories serves two interests. First, this “repetition may serve a particular function of supporting the development of the argument in the particular *Surah* where it occurs.”⁸⁷ Chapters in the Qur’an will often include narratives and historical, or textual, references that develop a central claim or idea. Repetition inside these stories reiterates the features of the stories that push the agenda of the chapter’s argument. According to el-Awa, there is another function of this type of repetition.

⁸⁵El-Awa, “Repetition in the Qur’an,” p. 580.

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 581.

⁸⁷Ibid, p. 589.

The second role is concerned with other occurrences of the same topic in the wider text of the Qur'an, where repetition gives access to different information about that topic and links this new information with other information from where it is previously mentioned. This means that there is an addition, with each paraphrase of the same topic, to the contextual information of that topic. In this way, with each repeated paraphrase of different aspects of the broad message of the Qur'an, the message develops gradually, establishing itself through those paraphrased repetitions.⁸⁸

In line with Robbins' contention, mentioned above, about the way in which repetition texture serves the reader in locating the overall agenda of a sacred narrative, el-Awa asserts that repetition allows the audience of the text to uncover how the Qur'an connects different information about the same topic. To ensure receipt of its message, the Qur'an utilizes repetition to provide context for the delivery of its central themes and topics.

The inclusion of overt repetition in the Qur'an allows for the development of the active reading process. Rather than simply addressing a topic that is presented in a lone instance inside of the text, repetition increases the accessibility of putting the Qur'an in conversation with itself. When coming across a narrative subject like the prophetic stories, the alert reader will recall that there are repeated elements in the story and put each instance of prophetic storytelling in a relationship with past, and future, instances. As a consequence, repetition offers a more holistic view of the Qur'anic narrative.

To illustrate this point, El-Awa refers to Noah's story, which is repeated with different features across the Qur'an. These different features offer specific details that serve the interest of

⁸⁸Ibid, pp. 589-590.

the given *surah* inside of which they are located. With the delayed paraphrase type of repetition, “each occurrence enforces the same concept, but in relation to a different context (depending on the immediate context of each occurrence).”⁸⁹ While Noah’s role in the Qur’an is discussed in greater depth below, El-Awa’s assessment of the variant accounts of Noah in the Qur’an does much to illustrate the role that repetition plays in the Qur’an. To begin with, by looking at the brief mention of Noah in *surah* 29, El-Awa notices how Noah is contextualized as sharing similar experiences with the other central prophets of the Qur’an.⁹⁰

The first example occurs in the context of the distinction between the fate of those who have followed God's message and those who have rejected it. The context extends to lessons from the history of other peoples who denied the messages of the Prophets sent to them and were punished, and engages in various related concepts regarding the missions of the Prophets, their lack of power over people, and God's way of treating people, which has always proved to be the same throughout the history of all nations, etc.⁹¹

Like a number of other Qur’anic prophets, Noah’s message is denied. Moreover, it appears that Noah lacks the capacity to sway the opinion of his audience. This instance shows that Noah’s experience is consistent with the uniform experience of prophets (and in the initial living context of the text the uniformity of the prophetic experience could be extended to Muhammad).

This story of Noah illustrates two of the main ideas regarding prophecy in the Qur’an: prophetic consistency and the prophet as model of behavior and experience. Both of these

⁸⁹Ibid, p. 592.

⁹⁰See Q 29:14-15.

⁹¹El-Awa, “Repetition in the Qur’an,” p. 590.

concepts are discussed by Devin Stewart in his work on prophetic typology. Stewart writes that although prophetic careers may have differences in details, prophets have a consistent role and perform recurring tasks. In addition, the Qur'an presents the experiences of past prophets as a model for the prophetic mission of Muhammad.⁹² Uniformity in experience and a point of emulation for Muhammad summarize key features of the Qur'anic prophet.

Prophets share experiences and serve as prototypes for Muhammad because their message is unchanged. The consistency of the prophetic message rests on the notion that God's message is eternal. The mission of the prophets is not altered "because neither human nature nor God's customary manner of dealing with humanity (*suunat Allah*) has changed."⁹³ However, unlike the Gospels which narrate the story of Jesus' work and life, the Qur'an indirectly tells the story of Muhammad. In particular, Qur'an relies on the past stories to speak about the prophetic experience through "rhetorical strategy based on model and analogy."⁹⁴ In regard to the many past prophets in the Qur'an, Michael Zwettler notices that they are presented "as precursors of Muhammad or, more precisely, adumbrations of his persona, deeds, and situation."⁹⁵ Not only do past prophets foreshadow Muhammad, but the "mutual resemblance of men of God' across the centuries is advanced as precedential corroboration of Muhammad's messengership and his message and retroactive confirmation of those of his predecessors."⁹⁶ According to the Qur'an, Muhammad is a prophet. So, his claims can be substantiated with the stories of past prophets. The consistency in the prophetic accounts and their messages allows for earlier prophets to

⁹²Devin J. Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English: Notes on Translation, Form, and Prophetic Typology," Zeinab Ibrahim, Nagwa Kasabgy, and Sabiha Aydelott (eds.), *Diversity in Language: Contrastive Studies in English and Arabic Theoretical and Applied Linguistics* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press), 2000, pp. 31-48, esp. pp. 41-42.

⁹³Ibid, p. 47.

⁹⁴Ibid, p. 47.

⁹⁵Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto," p. 98.

⁹⁶Ibid, p. 98.

prefigure Muhammad. Interestingly, by reminding his audience of their duty to previously established covenants, Muhammad's mission also verifies earlier prophetic claims. Muhammad both follows the prophetic "type" and he sets the prophetic "model."⁹⁷

Qur'anic prophets serve as an analogy for the experiences of Muhammad. According to Devin Stewart, "this rhetorical strategy shapes the discourse of the Qur'an."⁹⁸ Prophetic stories, therefore, also illustrate the central Qur'anic claim on Muhammad's position in a prophetic lineage. As we will discuss, this pedigree is one that is connected by a familial line, common experiences, and the covenantal relationship with God.

Noah, however, in *surah* 71 offers a broader view of the presentation of the prophet in the Qur'an. To this point, El-Awa writes:

In this *Surah*, which is entirely devoted to the story of Noah and his people, special focus is given to every aspect of his relation with them, its development, their insistence on denial, his grief at being rejected and his heart-felt prayers to God, and then the realization of God's promise, and a continuation of Noah's prayer that the earth be freed of those unbelievers and that forgiveness be granted to those who believe, at which point the *Surah* ends.⁹⁹

Where the description of Noah in the first example offers a "global context" of his position with other prophets, this account "expresses the more humane aspects of Noah's personality with its extensive details of his prayers and his feelings over being rejected."¹⁰⁰ The combination of

⁹⁷Ibid, p. 99.

⁹⁸Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English," p. 47.

⁹⁹El-Awa, "Repetition in the Qur'an," p. 591.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, p. 591.

these two examples illustrates the ways in which the experience of the Qur'anic Noah straddles the uniformity of the collective prophetic experience and the individuality of a specific prophetic personality.

It is through repetition, though, that we, as readers of the Qur'an, gain access to the duality in this presentation of Noah. With that in mind, el-Awa is correct in her assertion that the “whole of the two contexts, however, are strongly linked by the fact that they both reveal different information about the life of those people and that Prophet.”¹⁰¹ Repetition, however, does not only offer a more nuanced perspective of Noah. The recurrence of narrative textures also offers a better understanding of the information that the Qur'an claims to be important, but repetition texture also indicates the different ways in which these ideas, stories, and central characters serve the interest of specific sections of the text. Along these lines, El-Awa explains:

The story and the lessons derived from it in the Qur'anic text are only complete at the completion of all the contexts where the story is paraphrased since each repetition of the story adds to its contextual environment which is manifested in the gradual development of the story, the lessons learned from it and the concepts developing around it by both explicit and implicit expression. Not only is the information important, but also the contribution of the meaning of the story to Qur'anic thought.¹⁰²

Delayed paraphrase repetition is the most overt manner in which the Qur'an shows important textual concepts.

¹⁰¹Ibid, p. 591.

¹⁰²Ibid, p. 591.

Intertextual Analysis

While the inner texture of the Qur'an is the primary interest of this study, it will also address the manner in which the Qur'anic discourse expresses external narrative traditions, or the intertexture of the text. The main "goal of intertextual analysis is to ascertain the nature and result of processes of configuration and reconfiguration of phenomena in the world outside the text."¹⁰³ Among other things, intertextual analysis addresses the ways in which a text uses language from other texts and collective cultural knowledge to develop its particular claims.

More specifically, the Qur'anic discourse on past prophets includes numerous examples of what Robbins refers to as "recitation." This may be understood as "the transmission of speech or narrative, from either oral or written tradition, in the exact words in which the person has received the speech or narrative or in different words."¹⁰⁴ As mentioned above and detailed below, the Qur'an is filled with instances of a prophet echoing language from the textual traditions of Judaism and Christianity with exact or paraphrased repetition. The attribution of speech "to a particular person or text from the past evokes an explicit image of a person or text in the world outside the inner texture of the text. Attributing speech directly to a person creates a vividness and specificity that encourages the reader to accept the 'reality' of this person in the world outside the text."¹⁰⁵ This falls under a subcategory of recitation which Robbins refers to as a "*chreia*," or "a brief statement or action aptly attributed to a specific person or something analogous to a person."¹⁰⁶ The usage of a *chreia* in the Qur'an is one of the strongest examples of how the prophetic character is filled out into a more robust image. In recognition of the Qur'anic mode of economic narrative accounts, there are many instances when a prophet's career

¹⁰³Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁰⁵Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁰⁶Ibid, p. 41.

is quickly recounted. In this way it is a “recitation that summarizes a span of text that includes various episodes.”¹⁰⁷ Through the texture of recitation, the Qur’an will often economically encapsulate prophetic experiences in image rich summaries.

At various times, prophetic speech in the Qur’an may be either strikingly similar or noticeably different from that which is found in Jewish or Christian textual traditions. As opposed to recitation, which clearly repeats language from another tradition, recontextualization “presents wording from biblical texts without explicit statement or implication that the words ‘stand written’ anywhere else. This may occur either in narration or in attributed speech.”¹⁰⁸ In cases of both similarity and difference, the credited discourse serves to either develop or reiterate an issue discussed in Abrahamic sacred traditions. When there is sufficient similarity for a narrative account to be analogous to another tradition, but enough differences for there to be obvious narrative developments, this is referred to as “reconfiguration.” This can be understood as “recounting a situation in a manner that makes the later event ‘new’ in relation to a previous event. Because the new event is similar to a previous event, the new event replaces or ‘outshines’ the previous event, making the previous event a ‘foreshadowing’ of the more recent one.”¹⁰⁹ While reconfiguration does appear in the Qur’an, it is not implemented just to make the later event as new.

Rather, the Qur’an develops the notion that this new event both precedes and supersedes the earlier event described in another textual tradition. The Qur’anic claim is that its message, which comes later than the revealed books of the Torah and the Gospels, offers a return to the initial form of monotheism that came before the textual traditions of Judaism and Christianity.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸Ibid, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, p. 50.

The development of the prophetic personality of the Qur'anic Abraham and his role as a *hanif* is, quite possibly, the best example of how the Qur'an's new message offers a return to a pristine monotheistic message (this development is discussed in greater detail below under the overview of Abraham).

The Qur'an extends an established notion or storyline with the intertextual feature of narrative amplification, which utilizes recitation, recontextualization, and reconfiguration to develop a storyline.¹¹⁰ Many of the prophets from a biblical tradition are presented with narrative amplification in the Qur'an by taking a familiar character and adding new situational details to the storyline. Beyond narrative amplification, intertextual analysis can also address thematic elaboration between texts. According to Robbins,

Elaboration is not simply an expansion or amplification of a narrative. Rather, a theme or issue emerges in the form of a thesis or *chreia* near the beginning of a unit, and meanings and meaning-effects of this theme or issue unfold through argumentation as the unit progresses. The major topics or figures for elaborating the theme or issue are rationale, argument from the opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative testimony.¹¹¹

In the textual unit of a Qur'anic *surah* there are many instances when a central theme is addressed and developed not just through narration, but through the authoritative verbal account attributed to biblical prophets. A similar type of thematic development occurs inside of the textual unit of a given prophetic story. In fact, narration plays a minimal role in developing and presenting central themes. Dialogue, not narration, is the most common tool for the Qur'an to

¹¹⁰Ibid, p. 51.

¹¹¹Ibid, p. 52.

present the prophetic personalities of the Qur'an. It is, therefore, through attributed dialogue that we gain access to the accounts of the prophets and it is their shared experiences that serve as the strongest evidence for the Qur'anic stance on themes ranging from punishment for unbelief to divine omnipotence.

In addition, the Qur'anic narrative includes much briefer "references" and "echoes" that appeal to a cultural tradition by evoking the biblical prophets and central concepts (such as prophecy and monotheism) known within the shared social environments and traditions of the Abrahamic tradition.¹¹² Echoes and references from outside of the Qur'an appear in the tales of prophetic characters who dominate the majority of the text's dramatic accounts. The appearance of biblical circumstances and characters, in varying degrees of similarity with the vast body of Jewish and Christian sacred literature (canonical books and exegetical writing), indicate that the Qur'an is interacting with a larger body of work and beliefs shared, or disputed, between traditions.

Through intertextual analysis we can locate an exchange of shared concepts, characters, and covenants, which offers a better view and understanding of each text. Applying the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to biblical theology, L. Juliana M. Claassens explains that through the context of contact between texts an illumination of understanding is provided for both texts.¹¹³ This is because "no word or utterance or text is ever spoken in isolation. It always calls to mind other words, utterances, or texts pertaining to the same theme."¹¹⁴ As a consequence, meaning is not limited to one text. Rather, meaning emerges out from the dialogue created by interacting

¹¹²See Ibid, pp. 58-62, for a discussion on "cultural intertexture," "reference," and "echo."

¹¹³L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 122, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 127-144, esp. p. 130.

¹¹⁴Ibid, p. 129.

voices.¹¹⁵ According to Bakhtin, "Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth."¹¹⁶ The process of analysis creates a dialogic situation between texts. If life is dialogic, then creating dialogue between texts brings a text to life. That is, intertextual analysis brings out inherent meaning within a text.

From Bakhtin's viewpoint, the dialogue between texts is created because a text relates to preceding words and phrases. When a text relates to previous utterances, no word inside of a text exists in isolation. While engaging a particular work of literature, a reader will call to mind past utterances that relate to a similar theme or topic.¹¹⁷ By noticing "similarities in words, images, and themes," a reader creates dialogue between texts.¹¹⁸ Through this process, new meanings are brought to life through the comparison of utterances between texts. Bakhtin refers to this concern with the context of a given text as heteroglossia. This view rests on the idea that new interpretations are reliant on when and where a body of knowledge is brought together. In any time and place, a number of socio-historical factors combine and "insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions."¹¹⁹ Part of the originality of the Qur'an, for instance, is the way in which a unique historical dynamic led to new interpretations and developments of well-established prophetic characters, covenantal relationships, and notions regarding monotheism.

The Qur'an is suitable for a reader to create a dialogue of comparison because of the way in which it is filled with themes, scenes, and characters that are shared with other sacred texts. In

¹¹⁵Ibid, 130.

¹¹⁶Bakhtin is quoted in Ibid, p. 129.

¹¹⁷Ibid, pp. 129-130.

¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 137.

¹¹⁹M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 428.

particular, Bakhtin's notion of the "outsider," as it applies to a foreign text or culture, offers a means to introduce a new perspective on a familiar text.¹²⁰ In the case of the Qur'an, the "outsider" texts refer to traditions from outside of Islam, or, more specifically, the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity. The dialogue between the Qur'an and these outside traditions, or texts, allows for a mutual enrichment of textual understanding while enabling each text to retain its distinct message and voice.

In this mode of intertextual analysis, we should not assume that the Qur'an is comprised of material borrowed from an earlier, or original, textual or religious tradition. This premise is in contrast to a significant amount of literature in Western and Islamic scholarship which was concerned with connecting the Qur'anic text to its place of origin. Some Western scholars have challenged the accepted Muslim history of the preservation of Muhammad's message in its pristine form and the early canonization of the text.¹²¹

A Unified Text

In this study, the question of the origin of the text is, however, moved decidedly into the background. The issues and problems related to how the text developed do not alter the way in which the text has been received, studied, and read by a religious community. Therefore, this research accepts the premise that the text reflects a seventh century Arabian environment where the Muslim prophet Muhammad is introducing a new message to a diverse audience. Rather than a historical study of the Qur'an which looks back to uncover when the text originated, this is

¹²⁰Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue," p. 139.

¹²¹As mentioned below, Qur'anic scholarship in the modern era begins with Abraham Geiger study into Jewish origins for Qur'anic material. Modern historical research on the Qur'an continues with Gustav Weil and Theodor Noldke (*Geschichte des Qorans*, 1860). In addition, a focus on the link between the Qur'an and Jewish textual tradition continues into the early 20th century with the scholarship of Josef Horowitz and Charles Cutler Torrey, among others.

a literary study that uses interpretive-analytical strategies to locate cultural and textual topics that help an interpreter understand central assertions of the Qur'an.

Abraham Heschel wrote that the beauty of the literary quality of the Bible “has never been used as an argument in proving the dogma of revelation.”¹²² In contrast, since the introduction of its message, the Qur'an referred to its own literary style as evidence for its divine origin by presenting its literary quality as a challenge to the Arabs of Muhammad's social milieu (i.e. Q 2:23). Early Muslim theologians developed this further with the discussion of the inimitability (*i'jaz*) of the Qur'an.¹²³ In one example, Al-Rummānī (d.384 AH/ 994 CE) used the aesthetic beauty of the Qur'an's use of literary features (e.g. metaphor, simile, alliteration, etc.) as proof of the text's divine origins.¹²⁴

A focus on theological claims about the Qur'an came at the expense of illuminating the rich literary character of the Qur'an. For example, Mir asserts that al-Bāqillānī's (330 AH/930CE-403 AH/1013 CE) *I'jāz al-Qur'ān* “presents a theological doctrine with a vengeance, it can hardly be described as offering a keen analysis of the literary and rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an.”¹²⁵ Mir explains that the “‘theologization’ of the literary aspect of the Qur'an was unfortunate in two ways. First, it made appreciation of literature contingent upon subscription to dogma.”¹²⁶ If the literary brilliance of the Qur'an rests on acceptance of its message, unbelievers would be unlikely to accept the text's literary strengths. Second, a focus on religious validity “obscured the very merit and beauty of the Qur'an which, it had sought to prove, could not be

¹²²Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955), p. 237.

¹²³Mustansir Mir, “Some Figures of Speech in the Qur'an,” *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Autumn 2008), pp. 31-48, esp. p. 31.

¹²⁴Andrew Rippin “The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects,” *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1983), pp. 38-47, esp. pp. 39-40.

¹²⁵Mustansir Mir, “Irony in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Story of Joseph,” *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 173-187, esp. p. 173.

¹²⁶*Ibid*, p. 173.

matched or even approximated.”¹²⁷ Rather than basing literary character on religious authenticity, the theological and literary aspects are closely intertwined. Although the literary qualities do more than simply uncover core Qur’anic religious claims, a better understanding of the Qur’an’s literary dimensions make the text’s theological claims more apparent.

While theologians used the beauty of certain literary elements in the Qur’an to make a claim about the miraculous nature of the Qur’an as a revealed text, they did not use these literary elements as a method to understand the overarching textual claims. What is more, the literary features in the Qur’an were listed by the specific instances of their occurrences without consideration for how these textual elements may lend themselves to a sustained study of the Qur’an as a unified work of literature. In the argument for the inimitability of the Qur’an, these theologians used exegetical techniques that focused on identifying literary features, but did not explain how these features serve the coherence of the text, progress the narrative, or enrich dramatic episodes.

There are, however, precedents in Islamic scholarship for considering the Qur’an as a unified text. In his book, *Coherence in the Qur’an* (1986), Mir discusses some of the early (10th and 11th century CE) Muslim scholars who considered Qur’anic *nazm* (literally “order” or “arrangement,” but it usually refers to “coherence”) to be a crucial element of Qur’anic *i’jaz*.¹²⁸ Generally speaking, these scholars focused on *nazm* as the relationship between “words used and meanings intended” and how the Qur’an exceeded other types of discourse in the usage of this relationship.¹²⁹ Later scholars like al-Zarkashī (745-794 AH/1344-1391 CE) looked at the linear interrelationship (or how successive verses and *surahs* lead to another) within the Qur’an as

¹²⁷Ibid, p. 173.

¹²⁸Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’an* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986), pp. 12-16.

¹²⁹Ibid, p. 16.

evidence for textual cohesion. In addition, Mir looks at the more recent scholarship of Hamiduddin Farāhī (d. 1930), Amin Ahsan Islāhī (d. 1997), and, to a lesser extent, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) to discuss their arguments for structural and thematic coherence.¹³⁰

Mir focuses on how Islāhī develops the work of Farāhī. Among the similarities between Islāhī and Farāhī are their interest in finding the controlling theme, or *'amūd* (“pillar, column”), in a given *surah* and placing successive *surahs* into groups. Additionally, both Islāhī and Farāhī give an increased amount of attention to the Qur’an itself with less of a concern for reading external exegetical principles (e.g. Sunnah, Hadith, and *asbāb an-nuzūl*) into the text. Although, more than Farāhī (who considers parallels with Arabic poetry, the commentary of other scholars, and etymological discussions), Islāhī focuses on the Qur’anic text itself.¹³¹ Islāhī, in particular, influences Mir’s contention that the Qur’an’s unity allows for the text to explain itself and its central themes and claims.

Developing Islāhī’s work, Mir begins with the premise that the discourse of the Qur’an “possesses a certain degree of unity and coherence.”¹³² A study of the Qur’an as a work of literature, where the focus is on the continuity of the text, is categorically different from earlier scholarship which concerned itself with discontinuities in the Qur’anic narrative. Also, it is different from the traditional approach of theologians who took an atomistic approach of pulling out individual examples as evidence for theological or juridical claims. That is, rather than dividing the Qur’an into a rough amalgam of its individual narrative parts, or identifying pieces or components of the Qur’an that disagree with the text itself or other religious/sacred works of

¹³⁰Ibid, pp. 12-16.

¹³¹Ibid, p. 45

¹³²Mustansir Mir, “The Qur’an as Literature,” *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 1, The Literature of Islam (Spring, 1988), pp. 49-64, esp. p. 50.

literature, this approach focuses on locating narrative units (i.e. an identifiable, self-contained, and consistent storyline) that contribute to the larger, cohesive narrative of the Qur'an. Lastly, this study focuses on narrative claims made inside the Qur'an, rather than exegetical developments.

Western scholars are in disagreement about what constitutes a narrative unit in the Qur'an. For instance, John Wansbrough asserts that prophetic stories, or *logia*, are discernable narrative units that are the foundational building blocks for the development of the Qur'anic text.¹³³ In contrast, Angelika Neuwirth focuses on the *surah* as the fundamental narrative unit in the Qur'an because it "was intended by the Prophet as the formal medium for his proclamation."¹³⁴ From this view, a literary study of the Qur'an assumes that Qur'anic chapters are arranged as such because they serve the interest of advocating central textual messages. Nonetheless, inside of the Qur'anic *surahs* we are able to recognize a number of prophetic stories, which revolve around their dialogical instances. The primary narrative unit of investigation for this study are the dialogical occasions of the prophets inside of the Qur'anic *surahs*. However, we accept the understanding that these units of past prophetic recollections are misunderstood when they are disconnected from a given Qur'anic chapter, and the text as a whole. Prophetic stories, and the dialogues inside of them, should be studied to show how they add to the structure and thematic arguments of a given *surah* and the overall narrative of the Qur'an.

The arrangement of *surahs* in the Qur'an is helpful in understanding the significance of where and when prophetic accounts appear. There are 114 *surahs* in the Qur'an, which are

¹³³John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: 1977).

¹³⁴Angelika Neuwirth, "Some Notes on the Distinctive Linguistic and Literary Character of the Qur'an," *The Qur'an: Style and Contents*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 253-258, esp. p. 254.

organized by length, rather than by chronology. Although this is a well-known assertion, a brief example from *surahs* 12 and 13 suffices to illustrate this. *Surah* 12 tells the story of Joseph, his brothers, and Potiphar's wife. Thereafter *surah* 13 tells how Allah created the world, "Allah it is Who raised up the heavens without visible supports."¹³⁵ Quite obviously these two *surahs* do not proceed in chronological order (Joseph needed a world to be created for him to be able to carry out his destiny). Additionally, there is not a clear pattern regarding the place of revelation for a certain *surah* in the Qur'an. There are many more revelations from Mecca, than from Medina. Yet, the Meccan and Medinan revelations can be found dispersed in no particular order throughout the Qur'an. At times, the Medinan *surahs* are grouped together (e.g. *surahs* 2-5 and *surahs* 57-63), but other Medinan *surahs* are not (e.g. *surah* 33 and *surah* 110). Lastly, arrangement by length is not an absolute rule. The shortest *surah* is number 108, titled *Abundance* (with 3 verses), while the longest *surah* is number 2, titled *The Cow* (with 286 verses). With these examples in mind, it is evident that absolute rules of organization do not apply to the Qur'an. There are, however, general organizational patterns that appear in the Qur'an and it is these patterns that are helpful in uncovering an underlying agenda woven into the textures of the narrative.

Along the lines of texture patterns, it is worth noting not only where the stories of Noah and Solomon appear, but also where the majority of the prophetic stories are located in the text. The fact that the significant biblical characters of Solomon and Noah only appear in the first 'half' of the Qur'an may be significant. The first half of the Quran is filled with mentions of other prophets as well. Specifically Aaron, Abraham, Adam, David, and Moses are all mentioned frequently in the earlier (in reference to the Qur'anic order chapter) *surahs*. Yet, for

¹³⁵Q 13:2.

the most part, few of these characters are mentioned past *surah* 60 (Moses appears in *surahs* 79 and 87, and Noah appears in *surahs* 66 and 71). From this, it is possible to deduce the theory that the Qur'an is organized to situate biblical characters in a place of initial prominence inside of the Qur'anic narrative.

There are any number of ways to speculate about the significance of putting prophetic stories at the beginning of the Qur'anic narrative. Leading with narratives of past prophetic experiences seems to serve the function of capturing the attention of the Qur'anic audience for whom such narratives are familiar. H.A.R. Gibb writes:

A preacher [like Muhammad], if he is to be effective, must preach in terms which, on the one hand, are understood by his hearers, and on the other hand, appeal to their emotions. So also the Revelation must, *in its early stages*, use familiar language and traditional imagery, until its hearers have become receptive to a fuller development of religious thought.¹³⁶

The term “early stages” could refer to the initial period of Muhammad’s prophetic career, or what is referred to as the “Meccan period,” because it is the initial period during which an audience heard Muhammad’s message. The “early stages” could also refer to opening sections of the Qur’an wherein the textual reader is first introduced to the Prophet’s claims on religious truth. As mentioned below, the majority of the prophetic stories in the Qur’an were revealed during the Meccan period. In addition, most of the dialogical situations occur in the second and

¹³⁶H.A.R. Gibb is quoted in Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of the ‘The Poets’ and the Qur’ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority,” *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, James L. Kugel (ed.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 75-119, esp. p. 100.

third Meccan periods (to follow Noldeke's division of the *surahs*).¹³⁷ In its initial period of Muhammad's preaching and in the opening of the text of the Qur'an, the biblical prophets offer a sense of familiarity to the new message of the Qur'an.

The dialogical elements from these prophetic stories are some of the most emotionally evocative in the Qur'an. Accounts of past prophets in the early sections of the text allow for the Qur'anic audience to receive imagery from the circumstances of well-known biblical characters and situations. The individual personalities of these prophets and the dialogical accounts of the challenges that they faced serve as emotionally powerful to readers and listeners of the Qur'anic narrative. As a consequence, the position of these stories captures the audience's attention and serves as an accessible launching point for the central claims and the recurring themes of the text.

The narrative units that are the focus of this study are those which feature the Qur'an's prophetic characters and the dialogical instances included therein that serve to elucidate the agenda of the text through the development of the prophetic character. In looking at prophetic stories as a way to pull together the Qur'anic text, this study is similar to the approach found in Sydney Griffith's *The Bible in Arabic*. His inquiry into the Qur'anic prophets "respects the integrity of the Qur'an in its canonical form, as Muslims actually have it, and recognizes its distinctive kerygma. But it largely ignores later Islamic exegesis of the Qur'an."¹³⁸ A study that focuses on the instances of the prophetic claims across the Qur'an requires a unified text so that the dispersed stories may be understood for their similarities and recurring patterns. Moreover, this study works from the premise that there is much to be considered about prophetic dialogue in the Qur'an before a thorough study of Islamic exegetical literature should commence.

¹³⁷Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," p. 8.

¹³⁸Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 55.

CHAPTER ONE

The Conflation of Time and the Unification of the Narrative

One of the major issues at work in the relation of the Qur'an to textual traditions and social locations is that sacred time is different from profane time. Moreover, Qur'anic time is different from Biblical time because, unlike the Biblical narrative, the Qur'an is not arranged chronologically (in the order the *surahs* were revealed) or in the order of the events described within each *surah*.¹³⁹ In regard to the Qur'anic concept of time, Fazlur Rahman writes: "Time, for the Qur'an, is certainly relative and depends on the type of experience and status of being of the subject."¹⁴⁰ In the Qur'an, time is at the service of particular aspects of Qur'anic discourse (e.g. recitations of past prophets, cosmology, eschatology, tribulations related to Muhammad's prophetic mission, etc). Gordon Newby explains that the "unsettling tension between a historical account and the Qur'an's dehistoricized telling focuses the reader's attention on the Qur'anic message: the *exempla* of the past are freed from their historical shackles to become guides for choosing a moral path in the present."¹⁴¹ To develop a specific claim about a topic, Qur'anic time alternately conflates and expands by moving from the present to the past and back to the present.

While accounts of prophets in the Qur'an connect the past personages with current struggles, Qur'anic time also moves into the future. In particular, there is a focus on the looming

¹³⁹There are exceptions where certain *surahs* follow a chronological order more closely than others.

¹⁴⁰Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), p. 65.

¹⁴¹Gordon Newby, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins*. Eds. David B. Gowler, L. Gregory Bloomquist, and Duane F. Watson (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003) pp. 333-354, esp. p. 336.

of Day of Judgment, which is announced by many Qur'anic prophets. The wide range of the appeal to the past and a concern with the future is exhibited in the "temporal substructure" of the Qur'an, where one can find a "juxtaposition of the two ends of the time spectrum, creation and the day of judgment."¹⁴² The ominous description of the end of the days found in the Qur'an is strikingly similar to the depiction of events in the New Testament's Book of Revelation. In the first chapter of the Book of Revelation, at the beginning of the end of days, the narrator, John, hears a voice "Like a trumpet."¹⁴³ Similarly, in the Qur'an, the Day of Judgment begins with one blast from the trumpet.¹⁴⁴ The type of destruction at end times is also shared between Revelation and the Qur'an. The former has a long list of natural disasters.¹⁴⁵ Specifically, Revelation describes a "violent earthquake."¹⁴⁶ This earthquake is echoed in the Qur'an: "And the earth with the mountains shall be lifted up and crushed with one crash."¹⁴⁷ The threat of a future earthquake is repeated later in the Qur'an: "When Earth is shaken with her (final) earthquake."¹⁴⁸ The repetition of this destruction indicates that imminent threat continues to bring the text out from the past and present and into the future.

The bearing of this future punishment is not consistent for all. The Qur'an and the Book of Revelation make a distinction between the righteous and the sinners. In Revelation, the sinners will be thrown into the lake of fire, but that those who listen to the divine message will come into the paradise of God.¹⁴⁹ The Qur'an also makes the division between fates for the

¹⁴²Ibid, p. 337.

¹⁴³Rev. 1:10.

¹⁴⁴Q 69:13.

¹⁴⁵For the list of disasters see Rev. 8:7-9:11.

¹⁴⁶Rev. 16:17-18.

¹⁴⁷Q 69:14.

¹⁴⁸Q 99:1.

¹⁴⁹Rev. 20:11-21:8 and 2:1-3:22.

sinners and believers, “righteous verily will be in delight. And lo! the wicked verily will be in hell; They will burn therein on the Day of Judgment.”¹⁵⁰ This division between the believers and unbelievers will be apparent on the last day when the faces of the unbelievers will be downcast, and the believers will be calm.¹⁵¹

As in the Book of Revelation, the Qur’an describes Paradise waiting for the believers on this last day. Paradise is described as blissful and a garden.¹⁵² In contrast, there is a painful doom for those who do not worship God.¹⁵³ In a fashion similar to the Book of Revelation, the Qur’an provides a clear separation of fates for the believer and unbeliever.

The bifurcation between the fate for believers and unbelievers has significance for the Qur’anic audience. The Qur’an connects the lessons of the past with struggles in the present as a means to think about possible options for the future. As mentioned in this comparison of the Day of Judgment between the Qur’an and the Book of Revelations, the sacred texts share narrative details. However, the tendency to continually move between the past, the present, and the future, differentiates the Qur’an from other central religious narratives.

Readers more familiar with sacred texts from other traditions like the Hebrew Bible or New Testament may find that the flexibility of Qur’anic time produces a style that is disjointed and difficult to follow.¹⁵⁴ The elasticity of Qur’anic time, however, serves a sermon quality of

¹⁵⁰Q 82:13-15.

¹⁵¹Q 99:1-9.

¹⁵²Q 69:21-22.

¹⁵³Q 84:21.

¹⁵⁴The obstacles facing the new Qur’anic reader have become increasingly common due to the rise of interest in the Qur’an by those outside of the Islamic religious tradition. Of course, at the root of much of this recent attention are the events of 9/11, the involvement of US military in largely Muslim countries, and a sustained fear throughout parts of the US and Europe about ‘Islamic extremism.’ In response to these events and shared sentiments, more and more individuals are taking an interest in gaining a better understanding of Islam’s sacred book as a window through which to understand Islam and those individuals acting in the name of Islam. Although some of these textual ventures are dominated by a concern that is limited to the myopic search for individual instances of the text advocating violence, others are attempting, simply, to understand a text which does not always lend its more subtle meanings and themes easily to the casual reader. Whatever the intentions of the reader, a

the Qur'an, which has its most easily approachable examples in the *surahs* from the second or third Meccan periods.¹⁵⁵ Specifically, a large number of these *surahs* are sermonic in structure with a clear tripartite design: Introduction, or exhortation to a contemporary audience; Body, or appeal to textual traditions and historical figures and events to support moral claims; Conclusion, or a return to the initial contemporary dynamic and, often, reminder of how the cited references have relevance to the situation of the Qur'anic audience. This tripartite division is similar to what Vernon Robbins refers to as "opening-middle-closing texture," which is a pattern that resides within a section of discourse.¹⁵⁶

Inside of this texture, one finds a means for easier introduction to the difficulties of approaching the Qur'an. Devin Stewart writes that one of the most important Qur'anic rhetorical strategies is "the use of the pattern of Biblical prophecies in order to comment on or serve as a model for the prophecy of Muhammad."¹⁵⁷ This strategy is helpful for readers more familiar with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament because the Qur'an uses characters from both texts to develop its religious claims. In addition, characters of the Hebrew Bible are used in the New Testament "to make specific arguments concerning the nature of his life and works."¹⁵⁸ A familiarity with the Qur'an's usage of Biblical prophecy allows for an entry point into the Qur'an and it helps to elucidate a significant amount of the content in the Qur'an. The references to Biblical prophets usually occur in the middle section of the "opening-middle-closing texture."

When the prophetic stories occur in this texture, there is a general pattern. Stewart refers to this as the "generic prophetic pattern." It goes as follows:

method which assists in showing the Qur'an as a unified body of work will make the Qur'an more approachable for those attempting to understand the role of the text in the course of history.

¹⁵⁵In reference to Theodor Nöldeke's division of Qur'an *surahs*.

¹⁵⁶ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English," p. 40.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 40.

1. God selects a prophet (implied)
2. The prophet addresses his people (implied)
3. The prophet warns his people of God's wrath
4. They reject his warnings
5. God annihilates the rejecters, saving only prophet and believers¹⁵⁹

This pattern occurs across the Qur'an and indicates a strong sense of uniformity in the prophetic experience.

However, many scholars (like Roberto Tottoli) categorize the prophetic tales as simply punishment stories because of the eventual punishment for the community that rejects the prophet's warnings. In his article, "Formulaic Features of the Punishment-Stories," Alford Welch attempts to categorize repetitive statements and verses within the so-called "punishment-stories." Welch writes:

The "basic plot is that God sends or selects a messenger from among the people of a tribe or town, who urges his people to serve only the true God, warns them that they will be destroyed if they reject his message, which the majority do, and then God rescues the messenger and those who believe him and destroys those who do not."¹⁶⁰

From this description it appears that punishment stories are ostensibly synonymous with the prophetic stories. Yet, Welch writes: "The emphasis is on the people and towns destroyed rather

¹⁵⁹Ibid, p. 44.

¹⁶⁰Alford T. Welch, "Formulaic Features of the Punishment-Stories," *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, Issa J. Boullata (ed.), (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 77-116, esp. p. 78.

than on the messengers, who often are not even mentioned.”¹⁶¹ This claim runs counter to the way in which the Qur’an names communities by the prophet who is sent to them. For example, verses 42-44 of Q 22 (which is ironically quoted at the beginning of his article) warns of punishment, but it mentions the people of Noah, the people of Abraham, and the people of Lot (the implication, of course, is that the people have an identity only through the prophet who is sent). In addition, a focus on the theme of punishment for unbelief may come at the expense of discounting a number of features of the prophetic tales. God in the Qur’an does not only offer punishment; he also offers mercy. The prophets do not only come with a message of a pending punishment; they also come with news of the way in which the believer should relate to God. As we see in the accounts of Solomon and Noah (described below), belief in God comes before pursuit of material wealth or familial allegiance.

A look at a number of the Qur’an’s prophetic tales shows that they are not easily categorized solely within the parameters of punishment. Welch comments on some of the difficulties in classifying the punishment stories inside of a given *surah*. For example, in regard to *surah* 7, he is unclear on the purpose of the punishment stories and how they fit into this *surah*.¹⁶² Moreover, Welch asserts that Q 71 is “not in the form of a punishment-story,” due to its focus on a singular prophet (Welch maintains that punishment stories appear in groups).¹⁶³ However, as I discuss below, this *surah* includes a climactic element of punishment inside of the Noah narrative in the Qur’an. As a consequence, punishment may appear as one element of a prophetic story without encapsulating all of the described experiences of a particular prophetic

¹⁶¹Ibid, p. 78.

¹⁶²Ibid, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶³Ibid, p. 89.

account. The designation of “punishment-stories” limits the accounts of past prophets to just one aspect of their related experiences.

More than just punishment stories, prophetic accounts in the Qur’an detail the process through which an individual is called by God, the way in which a divine message is shared with a community, and how these dialogical exchanges speak to central ideas of the Qur’an. Nonetheless, the punishment portion of the story remains important because of the impact it has on the Qur’anic audience. Welch takes notice of the importance of punishment due to its rhetorical power.¹⁶⁴ This theme of punishing unbelief “is strengthened by the fact that the same message is presented repeatedly to the same or different audiences in a wide variety of interesting and indeed fascinating forms.”¹⁶⁵ The recurring punishment accounts are crucial to the Qur’an because the circumstances leading up to the cataclysmic destructions of the past are comparable to the conditions of the present. The danger of a pending punishment becomes a call to action to prevent the annihilation that was meted out to the communities of previous prophets.

In the opening of this type of pattern, the oratory voice of the Qur’anic text introduces a concept or issue which is relevant to its audience. A sermonic-type introduction in a *surah* usually addresses a contemporary problem and offers a judgment to resolve this issue. In the next section, the body of the *surah* then makes reference to the way in which God’s message confirms this judgment. As a way to support its stance on a given topic, the Qur’an draws support by appealing to traditions, or histories, which would have served the purpose of eliciting reverence and illustrating its message. After reference is made to past events and scriptures, in the conclusion the voice of the Qur’an returns to the contemporary dynamic to remind, or explain to, its audience the correlation between the sacred past and theologically weighted “now.” This

¹⁶⁴Ibid, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶⁵Ibid, p. 110.

conclusion in the last section, serves to reinforce that which was stated in the introduction and referenced in the body. For instance, after it has been established in the body, or middle, of the chapter that punishment has come to unbelievers in similar past experiences, the conclusion looks to explicitly state that this will happen again to those who fall on the side of unbelief regarding the contemporary problem addressed in the introduction.

An example of this tripartite division, or what is referred to in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation as “opening-middle-closing texture,” may be seen in *surah* 54, which can be divided into three sections. The first section, or the opening, consists of verses 1-8. This is the introduction of the *surah*. In this instance the introduction relates the contemporary problem in Muhammad’s day: unbelievers deny his message.¹⁶⁶ The first section of this *surah* ends after verse 8 with the introduction of Noah in verse 9. The first section is directly addressing Muhammad’s predicament with the unbelievers, so the reference to Noah (and other prophetic tales) signals the move toward an allusion to previous times. The record of past events relates how former prophets were ignored and God’s punishment of the unbelievers.¹⁶⁷ These examples are useful rhetorical tools to provide evidence for the judgment: “So withdraw from them on the day when the Summoner summoneth unto a painful thing.”¹⁶⁸ The second section of the *surah* ends with the beginning of the third section: “Who denied Our revelations, every one. Therefore, We grasped them with the grasp of the Mighty, the Powerful.”¹⁶⁹ This verse ends the recollection of bygone prophets by expressing the underlying message that disbelievers in the time of Muhammad will feel the mighty wrath of God. In the initial living context of the Qur’an, this Surah offers the argument that Muhammad, and his followers, should remove themselves

¹⁶⁶Q 54:3.

¹⁶⁷Q 54:9-42.

¹⁶⁸Q 54:6.

¹⁶⁹Q 54:42.

from disbelievers because God will punish the disbelievers as He did in the past prophetic stories.

This first section refers to unbelievers who are not inclined to accept Muhammad's message, "And they behold a portent they turn away and say: Prolonged illusion. They denied and followed their own lusts. Yet everything will come to a decision."¹⁷⁰ The people who do not believe Muhammad accuse him of making an illusion, rather than providing a genuine message. In response, Muhammad's revelation conciliates his audience by confirming that a judgment is forthcoming.¹⁷¹ References are made to the plights of previous prophets (found in the next section) who serve as a means to provide evidentiary support for the notion that a judgment will come to the unbelievers.

The second section, or the middle, is the main body of the surah, and the evidence for the argument which this chapter puts forward. This section consists of verses 9-42. In these verses one finds the prophetic testimony for the forthcoming decision against the unbelievers. This is done is by retelling the experiences of previous prophets in a collection of stories. Each story tells a different example of the same theme of unbelievers being punished for not following God's word. The stories are separated by a concluding remark (the one exception is the one verse mention of Pharaoh found in verse 41): "In truth We have made the Qur'an easy to remember; but is there any that have remembereth."¹⁷² With this repetitive texture, we see that by concluding stories of unbelief with this quote the Qur'an is explicitly illustrating the accessibility of the Qur'an's message. Therefore, when an individual decides not to follow this easily acquired message he is deserving of God's punishment.

¹⁷⁰Q 54:2-3.

¹⁷¹In reference to Q 54:6.

¹⁷²Q 55:17, 22, 32, and 40.

Like Muhammad's mission, these messages were delivered to an audience filled with unbelievers. In each case, God punishes those who did not heed the message of the prophet, and, although the specifics of the punishment vary from story to story, the theme of God's punishing the unbelievers is consistent. The sequence of previous prophetic experiences are as follows: Noah (Q 54:9-17), the tribe of A'dad (Q 54:18-22), the tribe of Thamud (Q 54:23-32), Lot (Q 54:33-40), and the house of Pharaoh (Q 54:41). In each of these narrative examples the prophet encounters people who disbelieve in the word of God. In response to this disbelief, God punishes all, or a section, of the community that received the message.

The last, or closing, section of *surah* 54 consists of verses 42-55. This section returns from referencing past prophetic messages to relating to Muhammad that the disbelievers in his audience will be punished, "The guilty are in error and madness. On the day when they are dragged into the Fire upon their faces: Feel the touch of Hell. Lo, we have created every thing by measure."¹⁷³ God created everything with a corresponding measurement; therefore the unbelievers will be treated in accordance with their actions. In this case, the just reward of unbelief is feeling the heat of Hell.

The conclusion states that for the unbelievers "the hour is their appointed tryst, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter."¹⁷⁴ The conclusion is a continuation of the message of punishment from the examples given in the middle section. However, the conclusion adds to the message as well. Not only will the disbelievers be punished, but the "righteous will dwell among gardens and rivers."¹⁷⁵ The conclusion confirms the middle section's point of punishment for disbelievers, and extends the message by offering a rich reward for the believers.

¹⁷³Q 54:48-50.

¹⁷⁴Q 54:46.

¹⁷⁵Q 54:54.

Stewart's work on prophetic typology shows that this *surah* presents a close connection between the experiences of past prophets and the challenges facing Muhammad. As mentioned above, the middle section of this *surah* begins with verse 9. In this transitional verse between the introduction and the middle section, the first prophetic story is Noah and begins with the accusation from his audience that he is a "madman." Stewart notices that this charge was leveled against Muhammad on a number of occasions (e.g., Q 52:29, 68:2, and 81:22).¹⁷⁶ This allegation alerts the reader of the connection between Muhammad's challenges and those that faced past prophets. However, there is a more explicit link between the contemporary Qur'anic audience and past prophetic experiences. The Noah story in verse 9 begins: "The folk of Noah denied before them." Stewart explains that the "pronoun 'them' here refers to the disbelievers of Muhammad's time who appear in verses 2-7 and are defined in verse 8, just preceding this verse. Verse 9 shows that the punishment stories which follow are intended as commentaries on the present situation and didactic examples."¹⁷⁷ The prophetic stories serve as lessons and cautionary tales for the Qur'anic listener. In the closing section of this *surah* the warning of the punishment of the unbelievers is delivered in verse 51: "And verily We have destroyed your fellows; but is there any that remembereth?" It appears that the "phrase 'your fellows' refers back to the earlier destroyed people, establishing the comparison between them and contemporary disbelievers explicitly yet again."¹⁷⁸ Now that the prophet Muhammad claims to have a divine message, it is up to each listening individual to choose whether the contemporary claim of prophecy will turn into a story of punishment or one of mercy.

¹⁷⁶Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English," p. 45.

¹⁷⁷Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁷⁸Ibid, p. 46.

Another example of this “opening-middle-closing texture” pattern is *surah 27*, which begins with an exhortation to follow the guidance of revelation.¹⁷⁹ To emphasize and illustrate the importance of adhering to this guidance offered in the Qur’an, the *surah* recites recollections of the past prophetic experiences of Moses, David, Solomon, Salih, and Lot.¹⁸⁰ The *surah* closes with a return from its historical recitations to remind its audience that prophetic stories serve as warnings for those who do not heed the advice of Qur’anic revelation.¹⁸¹

To connect recitations of the past with warnings in the present and incite a sense of urgency, the Qur’an often uses literary, structural, and thematic strategies to conflate the time dividing the events of the historical/scriptural appeal and the contemporary call to action. In his book, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Styles*, Muhammad Abdel Haleem comments on the way in which the Qur’an changes verb tense within the same verse or adjacent verses. In some instances (e.g. Q 33:10-11), the verb tense shifts from the perfect (past) to the imperfect (present) and gives the impression that a past action is occurring in the present. In other instances (e.g. Q 27:87), a verb shifts to the past tense to give impression that a future event had already happened.¹⁸² In both occurrences, the change of verb tense gives the listener the impression that an indecisive notion of time demands an immediate and decisive moral decision.

References to past prophets are a form of recitation that develops the rhetorical strength of the narrative. If one understands Qur’anic discourse as a form of a sermon, then one may read the Qur’an as a live transcript of the text making claims on theological truth in the religiously diverse environment of seventh-century Arabia. This is not to claim that the Qur’an is a text of

¹⁷⁹Q 27:1-6.

¹⁸⁰Q 27:7-58.

¹⁸¹Q 27:59-93.

¹⁸²Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2001), pp. 203-5.

unquestioned historical validity, but it is to say that the Qur'an reflects its interaction with the socio-historical concerns of its claimed initial time and place. In regard to the relationship between history and text, Hayden White writes:

The historically real, the past real, is that which can be referred only by way of an artifact that is textual in nature. The indexical, iconic, and symbolic notions of language, and therefore of texts, obscure the nature of this indirect referentiality, create the illusion that there is a past out there directly reflected in the texts. But even if we grant this, what we see is the reflection, not the thing itself.¹⁸³

A text does not tell the actual history, but the Qur'anic narrative provides a replicated image of the way in which the agenda of the text interacted with its social environment.

In consideration of the Qur'an's relationship with its initial environment, Qur'anic discourse represents one of the many voices engaged in the religious debates of Arabia in late antiquity. In this environment, prophetic stories and references in the Qur'an served to illustrate underlying textual themes and to reference specific topics. The prophetic stories proved to be evocative because they appealed to traditions that had rhetorical strength among the audience of listeners being addressed in the initial social context of the text, or what Mustansir Mir refers to as the "living context" of the Qur'an. To understand how the Qur'an's discursive style is representative of the delivery of these prophetic reminders in its living environment, Mir writes:

¹⁸³Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 209.

It will help to cast the Qur'an-persona as an orator delivering a message before an audience that includes believers, opponents, doubters, skeptics, and not to be forgotten, the undecided. Unlike a writer, a speaker addresses a live audience. He engages one or more segments of his audience, not necessarily in a predictable order but in the order-sometimes in the apparent *lack* of order-generated by the exigencies of a fluid situation. His audience, being no passive listeners, might interrupt to seek clarification, ask questions, express reservations, raise objections, or even to heckle, and the speaker may have to pause to address the audience's concerns...he may switch from one topic to another, and to yet another, as long as the topics all belong to the dynamic situation of which he and his audience are a part. All of this forms what we may call the living context of the Qur'an, and it is in light of this living context rather in that of any neat theoretical scheme that we should understand the narrative structure of the surahs, especially the longer surahs, of the Qur'an.¹⁸⁴

Although the unique Qur'anic narrative may appear disjointed in style, it represents the issues which were of concern and at the core of debates among the initial audience of the Qur'an. The allusive style of the Qur'anic narrative has a social, cultural, ideological, and religious relation to the lively debates that surrounded the initial delivery of the Qur'anic message to this community; it exhibits an interaction with the trials, tribulations, reflections, and victories of a 'new' message entering a community that was familiar with the 'old' messages. If the text emerged out of a later social dynamic (as suggested by John Wansbrough), then it would have been representative of a community which had the opportunity to clarify its message and explicitly codify its

¹⁸⁴ Mir, "Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur'an," pp 94-5.

religious legislation. For this reason, among others, it makes more sense to locate the text within the context of the building of the initial religious community.

Along with influencing the perceived socio-historical context of the text, this referential style of Qur'anic discourse has led some scholars to divide the text into separate narrative units. Most notably, Wansbrough asserts that the Qur'an's prophetic stories are divergent and irreconcilable narrative fragments of rabbinic material.¹⁸⁵ In an earlier study, Richard Bell's work on *asbāb an-nuzūl* ('occasions of revelation') focused on isolating individual verses from the context of the *surahs* within which they are located.¹⁸⁶ In response to these approaches, a synoptic reading of the narrative help us to understand the way in which the text interacts with itself by reciting, repeating, and progressing the central topics and concerns.

Newby notices that a synoptic textual reading of the Qur'an has been undertaken in Islamic custom, because it serves as a means to attain a fuller understanding of Qur'anic verses, especially those about the experiences of past prophets. Specifically he writes that inside of "Islamic tradition, the Qur'anic verses are usually disengaged from one another and recombined with verses from other chapters."¹⁸⁷ Prophetic stories, like those of Noah and Moses, are "often understood in combination with the portions of those stories and allusions to them elsewhere in the Qur'an rather than firmly fixing them within the narrative context of the chapter."¹⁸⁸ The repetitive aspects of the prophetic stories in the Qur'an makes these narrative units readily available to a synoptic reading. In addition, the Qur'an may be understood better when seemingly discrete prophetic stories from different textual sections are woven together.

¹⁸⁵Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*.

¹⁸⁶Richard Bell, *The Qur'an, Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the surahs*, 2 vol. (Edinburgh: 1939).

¹⁸⁷Newby, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," p. 337.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid*, p. 337.

Islamic hagiographic literature offers examples of attempts at synthesizing Qur’anic prophetic narratives. For example, in his *Sira*, Ibn Ishāq (d. 767 CE) uses material from seven Qur’anic *surahs* (21, 38, 34, 27, 4, 6, and 2) to construct a narrative commentary of the Qur’an’s presentation of the royal period of Solomon’s life, but he does not make use of all the Qur’anic material on the subject. As Gordon Newby explains, the decision to choose the Solomon story from the available texts and Hadith reports points to Ibn Ishāq’s adherence to the position that “the Qur’an was a faithful (but incomplete) representation of the *Umm al-Kitāb* (Q 43:4), the heavenly exemplar that informed all versions.”¹⁸⁹ In regard to this view, Newby invokes the work of Barbara Herrnstein Smith and her contention that there is “not an underlying versionless version which informs all occurrences of a narrative.”¹⁹⁰ Rather, Smith asserts that a narrative is an act or a “social transaction” which is conditioned by the social and cultural setting of the narrative and the psychological motives or interests of the narrator.¹⁹¹ Such a view coincides with Mir’s description of the Qur’anic persona as one who presents specific intentions inside of a communicative style which adheres to the text’s implied cultural setting.

If the ur-source and the celestial “versionless version” approaches both hinder the capacity to understand the utility of the Qur’anic narrative, then a Qur’anic approach which weaves together apparent divergences in the storyline will help to locate the overarching function of Qur’anic utterances. Mir writes:

“[It] goes without saying that, in order to understand, in its entirety, any Qur’anic story to which the principle of *tasrīf* is applicable, we must piece together all the versions of the

¹⁸⁹Gordon Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 20.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁹¹*Ibid*, p. 21.

story occurring in the Qur'an. In interpreting a Qur'anic story's overall meaning and significance, the principle of *tasrīf* would require us to collate and synthesize what we have called the more determinate and context-specific thrusts of the different version of the story."¹⁹²

Mir is looking for a unified synthesis of context-specific incidents which can be developed through a socio-rhetorical type of inner textual analysis.

A comparative study of specific textures and patterns in Qur'anic *surahs* provides the most approachable way to use socio-rhetorical interpretation to locate the strands of unifying language that tie the Qur'anic discourse together. In a study of a discourse, this may be accomplished by locating the larger patterns in a discourse that are brought out through the inner textual analysis of repetitive and progressive textures.¹⁹³ As mentioned in the previous chapter, repetition and progressive textures indicate the ways in which a word, idea, and/or phrase develop through a unit of the text, or through the text as a whole. Additionally, in the Qur'an, it is uncommon for thematic embellishment and narrative accounts to be localized to one section. Rather, the majority of prophetic recitations, central thematic developments and storylines reappear across *surahs*. With the tools of socio-rhetorical interpretation, one is better equipped to identify primary patterns, which, once located, put into context the central arguments of the text.

A new direction for development, beyond an acknowledgment of how socio-rhetorical interpretation elucidates the concept of *tasrīf*, is to consider a comparative study of the interpretive utility of prophetic dialogue inside the circumstances of one *surah* and across the

¹⁹²Mir, "Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur'an," p. 102.

¹⁹³Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 13.

shifting circumstances of different *surahs*. Not only does prophetic dialogue exhibit the specific message, or theme, of a given *surah*, but it also connects the topic of prophecy throughout the Qur'an. A number of *surahs* have a sermonic quality that appeals to a prophetic history as an instructional aide that illustrates the underlying message, or messages, of that *surah*. Beyond that, the Qur'an employs the dialogue of the prophets as a form of testimony to build evidence for overarching claims. The similarity in the type and nature of prophetic dialogue indicates the manner in which prophetic discourse in the Qur'an humanizes textual arguments by attributing conceptual claims to a list of speaking personalities.

At an initial stage, Mir has started a study of prophetic dialogue.¹⁹⁴ However, further development in this study may be done through a socio-rhetorical analysis of recurring patterns located in the instances of prophetic dialogue. This type of Qur'anic exploration locates the repetitive elements in prophetic dialogue which function as building blocks for constructing the model for prophetic behavior and character. In addition, studying dialogue in the Qur'an allows for insights into the Qur'anic presentation of the character of each prophet because "dialogue is one of the media through which the Qur'an emphasizes their humanity."¹⁹⁵ A study of prophetic dialogue in the Qur'an using socio-rhetorical interpretation, then, allows for a better view of the general prophetic character and specific prophetic personalities.

The Qur'an, specifically, often introduces dialogue with a short phrase (such as "*idh/wa idh* + verb ['Recall the time when such-and-such an event occurred'']) or a preceding narration informing the audience that God sent a prophet to a certain nation.¹⁹⁶ Both of these introductory markers for dialogue indicate how to contextualize, at least a section, of discourse as a form of

¹⁹⁴Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1992): pp. 1-22.

¹⁹⁵Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶Ibid, p. 11.

homiletic performance. Robbins and Newby have asserted that the Biblical text was “first and foremost an oral performance for people.”¹⁹⁷ This is the case in the Qur’an as well. According to Charles Briggs’ method of studying oral performance among a Hispanic community in Northern Mexico, a specific formula of “I remember that” or “I remember when” introduces the performance of historical discourse by a speaker.¹⁹⁸ The significance of the difference between the first person (the speaker) announcing his remembrance (in the example from Briggs’ work) and the call to the second person (the audience) ‘to remember’ (in the Qur’anic examples mentioned in Mir’s research) intensifies the evocative call for the audience to be brought into the historical recollection.

Within Qur’anic verses, the overt change in number indicates how shifting verbs may be a tool for making particular assertions within a specific *surah* and general claims that stretch across the body of the text. Building on the work of Suyūṭī (d. 911AH/1505 CE) and al-Zarkashī, Haleem has made a collection of the verses which include this transition (the four most common transitions in descending order of frequency): 1) Third to first person; 2) First to third person; 3) Third to second person; and 4) Second to third person).¹⁹⁹ Traditional Muslim specialists in Arabic grammar refer to this shift in person as *iltifāt* (‘conversion’ or ‘turning one’s face to’). It often occurs when God is speaking and, depending on which shift occurs, may serve to change the Qur’anic depiction of God in a number of ways. More specifically, the Qur’anic text uses a change in verb number to add weight to the claims which are made, usually, when God addresses the Qur’anic reader.

¹⁹⁷Vernon K. Robbins and Gordon D. Newby. “A Prolegomenon to the Relation of the Qur’an and the Bible,” *Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, John C. Reeves (ed.), Symposium Series 24 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 23-42, esp. p. 29.

¹⁹⁸Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexican Verbal Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. 62.

¹⁹⁹Haleem, *Understanding the Qur’an*, pp. 192-3.

With the shift in person of *iltifāt*, the Qur'an does not offer a consistent depiction of God through speech. This Qur'anic rhetorical technique of changing person or number during God's speech is one of the ways in which a clear image of God's character is obstructed. The method of *iltifāt*, which usually occurs when God addresses the Qur'anic reader or listener (e.g. Q 20:113 and 50:45), has been discussed in recent scholarship by Haleem and Neil Robinson.²⁰⁰ However, *iltifāt* also occurs during the dialogue between God and His prophet. In the midst of dialogue between Noah and God, for example, there is a change in number when God's reference to Himself switches from the first person singular to the first person plural: "Build the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration, and speak not unto Me on behalf of those who do wrong. Lo! they will be drowned."²⁰¹ Inside one verse, this change from the "plural of majesty" to the less formal first person singular shows the way in which God comforts His prophet by allowing him to form a closer connection with the Divine. Later in the Qur'an, and again in the story of Noah, there is another example of this shift in person:

Then We inspired in him, saying: Make the ship under Our eyes and Our inspiration. Then, when Our command cometh and the oven gusheth water, introduce therein of every (kind) two spouses, and thy household save him thereof against whom the Word hath already gone forth. And plead not with Me on behalf of those who have done wrong. Lo! they will be drowned.²⁰²

²⁰⁰Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an*, pp. 187-214 and Neil Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp. 245-52.

²⁰¹Q 11:37.

²⁰²Q 23:27.

From this dialogical instance, there is, again, an importance in the shift from the “plural of majesty” to the more personal first person singular. The Qur’anic reader may understand that while the royal “we” provided Noah with direction and inspiration, the prophet Noah should not appeal to the much more intimate “Me” in search of an appeal to emotion, or mercy. In this way, the Qur’an is expressing the development of a certain distance that separates God from His prophet.

While these instances of *iltifāt* may emphasize both God’s supremacy and the fluctuating distance between God and His prophet, they may also obfuscate the character of God. When this shifting image of God’s character is contrasted against the more robust image of the prophetic personality, there is a distinct difference in the presentation of God and His prophet. The reader is left with the feeling that while dialogue constructs a more comprehensive image of the prophet, even in speech, a complete understanding of God’s character remains elusive.

With an image of God remaining purposefully obscured, the Qur’an presents the prophet as the most accessible entity. To strengthen the homiletic discourse that precedes many of the Qur’anic presentations of prophetic histories, the intensified call ‘to remember’ calls the listener’s attention to recitations of past prophets. Newby asserts that when “homiletic discourse is used as a preface to the Qur’an’s recitation of history.... Histories become epitomized and recontextualized in service to the homily and the polemic.”²⁰³ If references to prophetic histories in the Qur’an are understood as evidence for specific Qur’anic polemics, understanding the dialogue in these histories provides insight into the ways in which the Qur’an makes a claim on its overarching arguments.

²⁰³Newby, “Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur’anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse,” p. 344.

CHAPTER TWO

The Prophet and the Messenger of the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the 'prophet-figure' is the central protagonist in many of the stories that appear across *surahs* (and sometimes appear in duplicate). To this point, Faruq Sherif states: "A most important part of the Qur'an (1453 verses or about one fourth of the total number) consists of narratives concerning the prophets, sages and other historical or legendary celebrities of ancient times, particularly of Semitic (Jewish and Arab) origin."²⁰⁴ These prophetic narratives cover a range of characters and they are told in accounts that range in presentation. "The longest of them (510 verses) concerns Moses and his people; the shortest (only 7 verses) relates to Job. In between, varying in length and detail, are 16 other narratives, beginning with Adam and ending in Christ."²⁰⁵ With Adam and Jesus as bookends of the order of past prophets, we see that the prophets of the Qur'an extend the full spectrum of biblical tradition between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), p. 46.

²⁰⁵Ibid, p. 46.

²⁰⁶A connection between Adam and Jesus is not limited to the line of Qur'anic prophets. In Christianity, there is the view that Jesus is the new Adam. This perspective develops from 1 Corinthians 15:45, where it says "it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being' [in reference to Genesis 2:7]; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."

These prophetic narratives differ in length, but they share common features that connect the prophetic stories in the Qur'an. Sherif sees a "leitmotiv running through all of them, namely the emphasis on faith in the one and only Creator, and on certain religious and ethical principles which are expressed also in other verses of the Qur'an."²⁰⁷ Alongside the recurrent topic of monotheism, the concept of the covenant is at the foundation of the relationship between Qur'anic prophet and God. It is the process of the prophet sharing this covenant with his audience that makes the prophetic experiences engaging. It is also the punishment for breaking the covenant that captures the attention of the Qur'anic audience.

Over and over again the Qur'an dwells on the calamities which God caused to descend on the people of past history for believing in polytheism, for discarding the notions of the hereafter, of resurrection, paradise and hell; for not fearing the wrath of God, for yielding to the temptations of Satan, and, in a word, for not obeying the commandments of God and His Apostle.²⁰⁸

This theme of punishment for not following the prophet's message of keeping the covenant appears often. One example of the centrality of this notion to the Qur'an can be found in *surah* 26, where a succession of prophetic type experiences (Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the pre-Islamic Arabian messengers, Hūd, Sālih, and Shu'ayb) are shared. "In essence the experience of all of them is the same. Each declares his mission to his people and says that he asks for no reward but only wants to preach to them the truth that there is but one God. However, his people

²⁰⁷Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an*, p. 46.

²⁰⁸*Ibid*, p. 46.

deny him, save a few.”²⁰⁹ This experience of substantial rejection, and minimal acceptance, unites the prophets of the Qur’an.

As a consequence, no Qur’anic prophet is alone in the process of receiving a divine sanction or facing the communal obstacles that grow in opposition to the proliferation of his message. In fact, the Qur’an is very clear in explaining that each prophet is part of a prophetic lineage that stretches back to Adam and closes with Muhammad, as the “seal of the prophets.”²¹⁰ The connectivity of the Qur’anic prophets and their experiences indicate an almost uniform prophetic character whose role remains constant throughout the different examples of past prophets. Rosalind Ward Gwynne notices that there “are passages in the Qur’an, such as the first half (verses 1-47) of *surah 21 al-Anbiyā’*, that speak of the mission of the prophets as a single phenomenon having generalized characteristics, and then there are the sequential [prophetic] stories.”²¹¹ There are similar examples in the following *surahs*: Q 7, 11, 19, and 26. These instances indicate the recurring vocation, function, and characteristics that are attached to the Qur’anic prophets.

The frequent attributes of the prophetic character indicate the ways in which the Qur’an situates the prophet at the center of its literary message. As Rahman asserts, prophecy is one of the central topics of the Qur’an.²¹² It could, however, be argued that prophecy is more crucial for understanding the Qur’an because the text uses the topic of prophecy and prophetic discourse both to introduce and to explain other central topics such as monotheism, covenant, and the Day of Judgment, and to support Muhammad’s role as the last prophet. Roberto Tottoli, however,

²⁰⁹Ibid, p. 46.

²¹⁰Q 33:40.

²¹¹Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an* (London: RoutledgeCruzon, 2004), p. 115.

²¹²Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, pp. 80-105. Although Rahman uses the term ‘theme,’ it is more accurate to think about prophecy as a ‘topic.’

asserts that while later Islamic literature and exegesis constructed the genre of *qisas al-anbiyā'* ("stories of the prophets"), the Quran does not classify prophetic stories as a part of a precise genre.²¹³

Regarding the lack of conformity in naming the prophetic stories, Tottoli notices that at different points in the Qur'an, prophetic tales are referred to as *qaṣas* (e.g., Q 12:3), *anbā'* (e.g., Q 12:102), and *hadīth* (e.g., Q 12:111). However, he does hypothesize that the term *asātīr al-awwālīn*, or 'stories/tales of the ancients,' (e.g., Q 6:25) seems to refer to stories contained in a holy text. Tottoli claims that the way in which the Qur'an uses the term implies that many in Muhammad's initial audience were familiar with these stories, but the audience dismissed these stories as untrue or unbelievable. In any case, a connection between the 'stories of the ancients' and the recitation of past prophets is purely speculative because the Qur'an never explicitly connects the two types of stories.²¹⁴

Nevertheless, in the Qur'an, the prophet (*nabī*), the messenger (*rasūl*), and the warner (*nadīr*) serve a consistent role as an intrusive and transformative figure that brings a reminder of a familiar message, but through a most evocatively terse delivery. There is also the title of *bashīr* ("bringer of glad tidings"), however it appears that this title is used for Muhammad, in particular, and it is contrasted against the label of "warner" (*nadīr*).²¹⁵ Yet, this dual function of the prophet extends beyond Muhammad. Mir explains that the "primary function of prophets is to give good tidings and issue warnings."²¹⁶ In comparison with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the prophetic narrative in the Qur'an is less concerned with including narrative

²¹³Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), pp. 11-12.

²¹⁴Ibid, pp. 11-13.

²¹⁵See Q 2:119, 5:19, 7:188, 11:2, 34:28, and 35:24.

²¹⁶Mustansir Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur'an* (New York: Pearson, 2008), p. 115.

details, and more concerned with a message that displays both admonitory imagery and approving encouragement. This powerful recollection of the prophetic narrative is meant to serve as an intrusive call for the Qur'anic reader to transform his behavior in accordance with the precepts of the prophetic message.

Within the realm of the prophetic narrative, there are two elements that, though subtle, are important to the depiction of the prophetic in the Qur'an. First, in the description of Qur'anic prophets (especially those who receive increased textual space) there exist characteristic specifics that indicate individual personalities and serve to carve a prophetic individual from the prophetic archetype. All prophets are connected, but each is distinct. Second, a majority of the studies on the Qur'an and many of those that focus specifically on prophets in the Qur'an, arbitrarily group the prophet (*nabī*), the messenger (*rasūl*), and the warner (*naḍīr*) under the umbrella term together a number of so-called 'prophets.'

To elaborate on the specific Qur'anic definition of prophet (*nabī*), Hartmut Bobzin offers an incisive description of just who the Qur'an calls a prophet. Bobzin builds on the research of Christian Colpe who has traced the term 'seal of the prophets' to Tertullian's (d. after 220 CE) use of the expression as a messianic reference to Jesus that was meant to be used as a polemic against Jews. Regarding the historical development of the term, Bobzin has found a similar usage of the term can be located in homilies from a fourth-century Syrian theologian, Aphraates (d. after 345), who seemed to use it to refer to Jesus and as part of polemical material against the Jews. However, rather than looking to the antecedent traditions of Christianity and Judaism for the origin of this term or to subsequent literature on the life of the Prophet Muhammad for the development of the term, Bobzin advocates a study of prophecy that is "a scrupulous examination

of the Qur'an's own employment of the word."²¹⁷ The means through which he undertakes this examination is through a focus on the development and usage of the terms *rasūl* (messenger) and *nabī* (prophet) in the Qur'an and between the Meccan and Medinan verses.

From this focus, Bobzin reaches the conclusion that the Qur'an presents Muhammad in Mecca as being a messenger who is sent to his people with a warning of the coming Day of Judgment. In Medina, the Qur'an portrays Muhammad as a chosen prophet. This is largely because of a conflict that occurred in Medina between the Jews and Muhammad's followers. Bobzin's conclusion is that the divide between the messenger in Mecca and the prophet in Medina results in the Qur'an's description of Muhammad as the 'seal of the prophets' (Q 33:40), a title that was meant to be a polemical response to the Jews in Medina.

However, textual evidence does not support that there was a strict break in Muhammad's vocation from messenger to prophet. For example, there are instances in the Medinan *surahs* when Muhammad is called *rasūl*. Additionally, Bobzin furthers his argument about the chosenness of Muhammad in the Qur'an with the 'seal of the prophets' title by explaining that a prophet and his community are both chosen. In response to the Jews in Medina, Muhammad is the new chosen prophet for a new chosen community. In *surah* 7, the Qur'an states that Muhammad is the "*an-nabi al-ummi*" (prophet of the (Muslim) community), rather than a prophet of *ahl-al kitab* (people of the book).²¹⁸ This could be seen as strong evidence that the Qur'an is constructing a new dispensation in salvation history with Muhammad as the chosen prophet and his community as the chosen community.

²¹⁷Hartmut Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood," *The Qur'an in Context*, pp. 565-84, esp. p. 569.

²¹⁸Q 7:157.

Yet, there is an issue with Bobzin's approach to the Qur'an because it rests on the separation of Meccan from Medinan *surahs*. The concern with dividing, rather than unifying the text, is that the Qur'an does not always coincide with such a sharp distinction of characteristics between the Meccan and Medinan *surahs*. For example, Bobzin's distinction between Muhammad the messenger in Mecca and Muhammad the prophet in Medina does not go along with the use of a verse from *surah* 7 (above), because this *surah* is classified as a Meccan *surah* (albeit a late Meccan *surah*, but a Meccan *surah* nonetheless). This raises questions about the process of the evolution of Muhammad the messenger to Muhammad the prophet in response to Jewish polemic. That is, why would Muhammad, in Mecca, be classified as the new 'chosen prophet' before he was in the midst of a polemical dispute with the Medinan Jews? Or, is this a Medinan interpolation in a late Meccan *surah*? These questions illustrate difficulties that emerge when focusing on the separation of the Qur'anic narrative.

Inside the Jewish community, discussion about the cessation of prophecy existed well before the dispute with Muhammad depicted by Bobzin. Building on the work of Bernard Jackson, Suzanne Last Stone asserts that Jewish prophetic activity in the late Second Temple period "entailed a conscious decision by the aspiring prophet to imitate an earlier prophecy and then to claim fulfillment of both the prophecy and the Deuteronomic promise."²¹⁹ The process of prophetic imitation, in particular with Jesus, revolved around the passage from Deuteronomy in which Moses tells the Israelites that "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him."²²⁰ While this passage develops into the basis for locating the "prophet-like-Moses," by the late Second Temple period

²¹⁹Suzanne Last Stone, "The Transformation of Prophecy," *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 167-188, esp. p. 169.

²²⁰Deuteronomy 18:15.

Jewish sages were in the process of establishing the authority of their office and the legitimacy of their developing process of textual interpretation. The rise of the rabbis filled an authoritative vacuum that stretch back to the end of the Persian period when the place of the prophetic leadership in the Jewish community was diminished and the “transmission of the law had been placed solely within the hands of the sages.”²²¹ Frederick Greenspahn explains that in “accepting prophetic leadership as one stage in Jewish history, the rabbis relegated it to the past.”²²² While prophetic leadership was relegated to history, the promise of a returning prophet is pushed into the indeterminate future through identification with the messianic figures of Jeremiah and Elijah. It was not that prophecy had ceased to exist; it was that leadership now rested with other individuals inside of the Jewish community.²²³ The “prophet-like-Moses” who leads the community becomes equated with the sages who illuminate legal decisions. The sages, scholars, and rabbis take the place of prophets in a line of authority that stretches back to Moses.²²⁴ In this way, the interpreters of the Jewish law become connected to the initial giver of Jewish law.

The rabbis were attempting to establish control over the religious message inside of the community by transferring prophecy into the realm of past revelation. While rabbis of the late Second Temple period recognized the potential for the continued existence of prophecy, they denied the legitimacy of the authenticity of contemporary prophets because, as “Josephus makes eminently clear, these figures' eschatological mission posed a severe threat to the existing social order.”²²⁵ Rather, the rabbis attempted to limit prophecy to the confines of past revelation, which

²²¹Stone, “The Transformation of Prophecy,” p. 175.

²²²Frederick E. Greenspahn, “Why Prophecy Ceased,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 37-49, esp. p. 48.

²²³Ibid, p. 47.

²²⁴Stone, “The Transformation of Prophecy,” pp. 179-180.

²²⁵Greenspahn, “Why Prophecy Ceased,” p. 49.

they alone had the ability to interpret into the needs of the time. Greenspahn makes the comparison between the way in which the Qur'an's placement of Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets" (Q 33:40) and the rabbis' attempt to establish control of religious authority. Both cases indicate an attempt to prevent future prophets from "claiming a more direct link to the divine while undermining the theological basis for such figures' anti-establishment activities."²²⁶ A common theme emerges of an attempt to establish a law giving institution that will not be undermined by the powerful potential of an individual claiming prophecy and offering a new direction for a community.

At the time of the initial reception of the Qur'anic message, a significant portion of Muhammad's audience were Jews who would be more likely to embrace his message if there were intercommunal similarities between Judaism and Muhammad's message. The strong connection between the roles of Muhammad and Moses illustrate such an intercommunal similarity. In particular Muhammad's position of prophetic leadership is interwoven with his vocation as a lawgiver, like Moses. As a consequence, there is a leadership lineage that connects the two prophets.

By discussing Muhammad's development into a lawgiver like Moses, Bobzin attempts to rectify issues associated with separating Meccan from Medinan *surahs*. He claims that the development from messenger to prophet should not be seen as something that occurred as a sharp break, but a turning point. To explain this, Bobzin refers to the degree in which Moses serves as an example for Muhammad throughout the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not the only sacred text that includes Moses as a point of prophetic emulation. In Acts 3:22-23 of the New Testament, Peter quotes the "prophet-like-Moses" verse from Deuteronomy (mentioned above)

²²⁶Ibid, p. 49.

as a way to legitimize Jesus' mission.²²⁷ However, more than the New Testament, the Qur'an develops a broad narrative about Moses. In particular, Bobzin explains that Moses, like Muhammad, was initially a messenger or "preacher of penitence" before becoming the prophet or "lawgiver" after leading his community away from the place of persecution. From this perspective, the Muhammad of Mecca is a preacher who develops into a lawgiver in Medina. The turning point for Moses' development beyond preacher and into lawgiver occurs when Moses leads his people on a redemptive journey out of Egypt. A similar change occurs with Muhammad. The moment of development from preacher to lawgiver is "the Exodus for Moses" and the "Hijra for Muhammad."²²⁸ In both cases, it is a liberating journey that precedes the vocational transformation.

Using Moses as a paradigm for describing the manner in which Muhammad's 'calling' evolved indicates the way in which Moses' prophetic career in the Qur'an is used to authenticate the experiences in Muhammad's development. Yet, to be clear, in the Qur'an and the Hadith traditions, Muhammad is not modeled after Moses. While the Qur'an presents Muhammad as the most recent (and last) iteration of past prophets, the story of Moses in the Qur'an, like the accounts of all Qur'anic prophets, is developed to emulate the experiences of Muhammad's prophetic career (not the other way around, as has been suggested by works such as John Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies*). This is in agreement with Tottoli's view that the careers of the biblical prophets were superimposed over the incidents encountered by Muhammad in Mecca and, to a lesser extent, Medina.²²⁹ The Qur'an presents a narrative which allows for a vibrant prophetic tradition, offering prophetic storylines that coincide with the needs of the hour. This is

²²⁷Stone, "The Transformation of Prophecy," p. 172.

²²⁸Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets,'" p. 579.

²²⁹Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, p. 35.

in line with Stone assertion that “prophecy is constantly in the process of transforming itself.”²³⁰ The story of Moses in the Qur’an is connected to the pivotal moments in Muhammad’s developments as a prophet and lawgiver. The central section of the Mosaic narrative in the Qur’an is the often repeated showdown between Moses and the Pharaoh. This confrontation is important because it occurred at the precipice of the moment when Moses leads his people to redemption and into a social situation where he becomes a giver of God’s laws.

In contrast, Wansbrough suggests that Muhammad is developed as an equal to Moses and subsequently elevated above him.²³¹ This idea is part of Wansbrough’s larger claim that Muhammad’s depicted mission developed out of Judeo-Muslim polemic at a point much later than the Islamic assertion of the Qur’an’s initial social context. With the completion of the Qur’an, Wansbrough asserts that there was a transfer of imagery from the Jews to the Quraysh.²³² While Wansbrough’s claim is that Moses is a fixed character after whom Muhammad is modeled, this study works from the premise that the presentation of Qur’anic prophets serves to support the various features of Muhammad’s life and his message.

The indications that point to a subtle shift from Muhammad as messenger to Muhammad as prophet and the Qur’anic application of the different titles of *rasūl* and *nabī* indicate that the two are not completely synonymous. To illustrate the difference, Bobzin utilizes an analysis of what would be called “repetition texture” in Socio Rhetorical analytic terms to locate an overview of the ways in which the terms prophet and messenger appear throughout the text. His analysis indicates that *rasūl* (messenger) appears with far greater frequency than *nabī* (prophet). Specifically, *nabī* appears a total of seventy-five times; fifty-four times in the singular and

²³⁰Stone, “The Transformation of Prophecy,” p. 169.

²³¹Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, pp. 38 and 56.

²³²Ibid, pp. 71-72.

twenty-one times in the plural (*nabiyyūn* or *'anbiyā'*). In comparison, *rasūl* appears a total of three hundred and thirty-two times; two hundred and thirty-six times in the singular and ninety-six times in the plural (*rusul*). In addition, from the framework of Nöldeke's chronology, *nabī* appears most often in the Medinan *surahs*, and the Qur'an does not refer to Muhammad as a *nabī* prior to the Medinan *surahs*.²³³ In regard to a concern with the occasions of revelations (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), this later usage of *nabī* supports Bobzin's underlying claim about the character development of Muhammad, while also discrediting W. Montgomery Watt's assertion that Muhammad was prophet in Mecca and a statesman in Medina.²³⁴

Along with providing a broader understanding of the Qur'anic presentation of the vocation of Muhammad, Bobzin's study draws a distinction between the terms *nabī* and *rasūl* and offers a clear list of all of the prophetic characters in the Qur'an. By tracing the Qur'anic usage of each term, Bobzin reaches the conclusion that there are twenty-two individuals who are labeled as a 'prophet' (*nabī*) in the Qur'an; aside from Muhammad, all of whom come from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The three pre-Islamic 'prophets' (Hūd, Sāliḥ, and Shu'ayb) are, by definition, 'messengers,' as they receive the title *rasūl*, but never *nabī*. By excluding all of the pre-Islamic Arabian messengers from attaining a prophetic status, an overall Qur'anic plan indicates that, before Muhammad, only biblical characters are prophets.

In recognition that every Qur'anic prophet is a biblical character, we see that prophecy in the Qur'an is linked to the biblical tradition. In the Bible a prophet is "an individual chosen by God to convey a definite religious and moral message from God to humanity, a message that bears on and has implications for human life and human destiny."²³⁵ This definition is consistent

²³³Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets,'" p. 568.

²³⁴See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

²³⁵Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, p. 117.

with Qur'anic prophecy because revelation is nearly identical in the Bible and the Qur'an. In both texts, a prophet receives a message from God and delivers this message orally to his people.²³⁶ This close connection between the biblical and Qur'anic prophet is missing from numerous studies. Stewart observes that many scholars "have not sufficiently stressed the point that Muhammad's prophecy was formulated in Biblical terms."²³⁷ Awareness of the Qur'an development of biblical characters deepens our understanding of the Qur'anic prophetic characters and the topic of prophecy.

Of course, there is significant overlap in the features attached to titles *rasūl* and *nabī* of the Qur'an, "such as scripture (*kitāb*), miracles (*āyāt*), and inspiration (*wahy*)."²³⁸ Many of the Qur'an's messengers and prophets share the experience of receiving a divine inspiration in the form of a sacred scripture, which is seen as a form of a miracle. Apart from these shared features, Bobzin states that "a constitutive feature of a *rasūl*" is that they have been sent to a 'specific people.'²³⁹ Not only is the *rasūl* sent to a certain community, but they also come with a warning of an impending catastrophe.²⁴⁰ This is not always the case with the Qur'anic prophets, who are "partly determined by their genealogy, that is, they all come from a particular lineage (*dhurriyya*)."²⁴¹ In regard to the lineage of the prophets, the Qur'an references the family of the prophets, "Allah preferred Adam and Noah and the Family of Abraham and the Family of 'Imran above (all His) creatures."²⁴² In addition to the unnamed ancestors of Abraham, the title,

²³⁶Ibid, p. 118.

²³⁷Stewart, "Understanding the Koran in English," p. 40.

²³⁸Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets,'" pp. 571-572.

²³⁹Ibid, p. 572.

²⁴⁰Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto," p. 86.

²⁴¹Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets,'" p. 572.

²⁴²Q 3:33.

family of ‘Imran, is extended to Mary and Jesus in the Qur’an.²⁴³ While the messenger is directed toward a specific community, the prophet is attached to a specific lineage.

The image of the Qur’anic prophet takes a more defined shape when we acknowledge a number of the characteristics of the prophet, in the particular, in the Qur’an. As mentioned earlier, the prophets have uniform functions and are presented as models of experience for Muhammad. These two aspects of the prophet (*nabī*) are shared with the Qur’anic messenger (*rasūl*) and the warner (*nadīr*). Unique to the prophet is the way that all Qur’anic prophets share a biblical lineage and a common genealogical ancestry.

According to Ayatollah Khomeini, “a distinction is made between the prophet (*nabī*) and the messenger (*rasūl*): the latter has the mission of communicating the knowledge he has received, while the former merely receives it.”²⁴⁴ Through Bobzin’s careful analysis of the appearance of the two terms it is evident that this is not the case. From Bobzin’s research, the following characters are listed as *nabī*, but never as *rasūl*: Enoch (*Idrīs*), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Jonah, Job, and John the Baptist. Although the Qur’an is not explicit in the designation of the title, the following are also listed under the sole designation of *nabī*: Adam, Joseph, and Zacharias. Curiously, although the Qur’an never mentions him by name, Samuel is included in Bobzin’s list among those who take the singular title of *nabī*.²⁴⁵ As discussed below, there are numerous instances when many of the above-mentioned prophets do not simply receive the divine message but share God’s word as well. Among the previously mentioned names, Abraham is the most obvious example of one who shares the knowledge given to him.²⁴⁶ As a

²⁴³Q 66:12.

²⁴⁴Algar, Hamid, trans., *Islam and Revolution*, p. 101.

²⁴⁵Bobzin, “The ‘Seal of the Prophets,’” pp. 571-572.

²⁴⁶For example, Abraham shares God’s message with his people in Q 29:16-17.

consequence, Bobzin's work with the repetition texture shows that it is a flawed assertion to claim that a *rasūl* shares a message, while a *nabī* keeps the message to himself.

For the sake of a comprehensive discussion, it should be mentioned which Qur'anic characters are referred to as *rasūl* and *nabī*. Bobzin finds that the following individuals are both "prophet" and "messenger": Noah, Ishmael, Moses, Aaron, Jesus, and Muhammad.²⁴⁷ Although not labelled explicitly as such inside of the Qur'an, Bobzin includes the following personages on the list of receiving both titles: Lot, Elijah, and Elisha.²⁴⁸ Because of his central place in the text, and in later Islamic exegetical literature, it is curious to note that Abraham does not receive both vocational descriptions. While it is surprising that Abraham is missing from this list, it is not surprising that Qur'anic central characters Noah, Moses, and Jesus take both labels. Moreover, in consideration that Muhammad is said to be the revealer of this new message, it is expected that he is both prophet and messenger. The inclusion of Ishmael and Aaron in this list is a bit more complicated. A significant factor for the attribution of both titles to Aaron is his position as a spokesman for Moses. With Ishmael, his presence in this list may indicate a subtle hint of the way that, later in Islamic theological, and Muhammad's genealogical, development, Ishmael becomes the favored son over Isaac. While the reasons behind the placement of these labels on different individuals may be contested, this overarching list offers a better general view of the position of prophetic characters inside the Qur'an.

To develop further the role and function of the Prophet, the Qur'an connects Muhammad to an ancestral/historical tradition of prophecy. The familial line of the Qur'anic prophet stretches from seventh century Arabia to the biblical Genesis and links the first prophet, Adam,

²⁴⁷Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets,'" pp. 571-572.

²⁴⁸Ibid, pp. 571-572.

to the last prophet, Muhammad. This is a connection that is genealogical as much as it is vocational.

General Prophetic Function

While the etymology and precise meaning of the word may be unclear, the Arabic *nabī* is related to the Hebrew *nabi*. The Hebrew verbal forms of *nabi*, *nibba'*, and *hitnabbe'* could be related to the Akkadian *nabū* ("to call"). In Hebrew, *nabi* "seems to denote a person who is the passive object of an action from without."²⁴⁹ Therefore, *nabi* could be translated as "one who is called (by God), one who has a vocation (from God), as well as one who is subject to the influence of a demon or false god, and who retains the condition imposed upon him by that call or influence."²⁵⁰ From this definition, a prophet may be likened to a vessel that is filled with a vocation by his call from a deity.

More than that, this prophet is obliged by the circumstance of the call to share his received message. Therefore, the prophet's function has two components. First, he receives a message and, second, he expresses this message. To understand the manner in which the prophet expresses his role, Heschel explains that every revelatory consists of two phases

In the first phase we have an interruption and ceasing; in the second, a continuance and progress. The first we term a *turning*, or a *decision*; the second, a *direction*. Thus there are two aspects to inspiration as seen from the prophet's point of view; a moment of decision, or a turning, and a moment of expression, a direction.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: Part II* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 185.

²⁵⁰Ibid, p. 185.

²⁵¹Ibid, p. 215.

From Heschel's perspective, the distinctiveness of the revelatory experience is that a normally silent and hidden God communicates by emerging from His concealment to reveal His intentions by calling to a prophet. The prophet's decision to answer the call and receive revelation allows for the delivery of a divine direction. The successful delivery of His message to His prophet connotes the completion of the divine component of the prophetic experience. The responsibility now falls on the prophet to complete his function and share the message.

By sharing the received revelation, a prophet fulfils his vocational duty. According to Erich Fromm, this second portion of the prophetic experiences is fourfold in function:

(1) They announce to man that there is God, the One who revealed himself to them... (2) They show man alternatives between which he can choose, and the consequences of these alternatives. They often express this alternative in terms of God's rewards and punishment, but it is always man who, by his own action, makes the choice. (3) They dissent and protest when man takes the wrong road. But they do not abandon the people; they are their conscience, speaking up when everybody else is silent. (4) They do not think in terms of individual salvation only, but believe that individual salvation is bound up with the salvation of society.²⁵²

An abbreviated version of this view is as follows: an announcement of monotheism, a choice between belief and disbelief, conflict with the audience, and a concern for belief in the

²⁵²Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be As Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), pp. 117-118.

community. From this view, the prophetic vocation is to offer continued guidance to society by sharing the news of his divine communication, and stating the opposing consequences for obeying or ignoring this message. By extending his message beyond one individual to all of society, Heschel declares that the “prophet may be regarded as the first universal man in history; he is concerned with, and addresses himself to, all men. It was not an emperor, but a prophet, who first conceived of the unity of all men.”²⁵³ The uniqueness of the prophet offers the paradox of his function. That is, the prophet is a specific recipient of God’s message who is tasked with communicating with a general audience.

In a more succinct manner, Heschel summarizes the prophetic vocation: “His mission is to speak.”²⁵⁴ It is through speech that one discovers the “marvel of a prophet’s work” because by speaking “the prophet reveals God.” In other words, in the prophet’s word, “*the invisible God becomes audible*.”²⁵⁵ In her book *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, Gwynne affirms Heschel’s concept of God’s communication with humanity by asserting that a significant portion of sacred history is God’s speech, and the human response to it.²⁵⁶ If the moment of prophetic revelation represents the instance of God breaking his silence and emerging from hiding, then hearing the prophet’s verbal account of that experience is the closest his audience will come to envisioning the divine.

When the prophet speaks to his community, he does it with a sense of urgency. Northrop Frye contextualizes prophetic speech as oriented toward the future with the perception of a looming crisis. As a consequence, the prophet is under pressure to share a message which has

²⁵³Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1969), p. 169.

²⁵⁴Ibid, p. 22.

²⁵⁵Ibid, p. 22.

²⁵⁶Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, p. 2.

the capacity to prevent this looming crisis.²⁵⁷ Due to the concern with a crisis, a prophet is focused on the future. From the view of James Kugel, the prophet's attention on the future is in contrast to the wise man who looks to the past.²⁵⁸ However, Neuwirth asserts that the focus on the future and the concern with the past converge with the Qur'anic prophet.²⁵⁹ In the Qur'an, a prophet may look to the past because of the uniform vocational experience shared with previous prophets.

Yet, the prophet does not share a generic experience. Rather, the nature of each prophet's divine encounter is an extremely personal experience because the occasion of revelation "is not a voice crying in the wilderness, but an act of received communication."²⁶⁰ An act of communication is a personal event that develops into a relationship when intention is conveyed from one party to another. In this way, the prophet speaks about the development of his relationship with God.²⁶¹

Therefore, the prophet's subsequent speech to society at large, or his community in particular, is a testimony to what he witnessed in his divine communication. Heschel explains that as "a witness, the prophet is more than a messenger. As a messenger, his task is to deliver the word; as a witness, he must bear testimony that the word is divine."²⁶² More than just delivering a message, the prophet serves as a witness, or *shahīd*.²⁶³ There is also the translation

²⁵⁷Northrop Frye is referenced in Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 597-598.

²⁵⁸James Kugel is referenced in *Ibid*, p. 598.

²⁵⁹*Ibid*, p. 598.

²⁶⁰Heschel, *The Prophets: Part II*, p. 217.

²⁶¹Along these lines, Muhammad's prophetic experience is unique to that of the Hebrew prophets because accepted Islamic theology takes a stance against the concept of anthropomorphism. Rather than a direct encounter, in the tradition of Moses face-to-face with God (i.e., Exodus 33:11 and Q 4:164), Muhammad's exchange with God is through the intermediary of the angel, *Jibrīl*. Nonetheless, Muhammad's encounter, like the other Qur'anic prophets is an experience of bearing witness to a divine message.

²⁶²Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction*, p. 22.

²⁶³It is worth noting that *shahīd* occurs in the *fa'il* form. While the *maf'ūl* form is a recipient of a single verbal action, in the *fa'il* form the recipient of the verbal action is transformed into a permanent state. As a consequence, there is a sense of permanence to the transformative experience of receiving a divine message.

of *shahīd* as martyr, but it can be understood in its current popular usage regarding suicide bombers and the like. Alexander Gordon writes that a martyr is a “witnessbearer” and it can be related to the “man or nation that stands forth as the prophet of righteousness” and one who “can hardly hope to escape calumny and persecution even to the death.”²⁶⁴ Persecution is certainly a common feature of the prophetic experiences described in the Qur’an. In early Christianity, however, “a martyr was also the champion of a new body of knowledge, a charismatic person who, by offering his life for his faith, subdued chaos and introduced a different order.” The martyr brings new knowledge by serving as a charismatic messenger.²⁶⁵ Beyond that, as a witness, he “is someone who is apart, a stranger who is there but not in. He was the passer-by, the onlooker whose testimony could change the course of things.”²⁶⁶ In this way, the martyr like the prophet exists on the fringe of the society to which he is sent and brings testimony from his divine encounter. In addition, their testimonies have the capacity to shift the established social norm.

The martyr and the prophet share the experience of being a witness to a transformational experience. Yet, there is a difference between the two because the “meaning of martyr combines the idea of self-sacrifice and annihilation of the body for an ideal with the act of witnessing an event.”²⁶⁷ In contrast, although a prophet is often persecuted, there is not the necessary complete annihilation of self for belief.

²⁶⁴Alexander R. Gordon, “The Prophets as Internationalists. Isaiah. II. The Prophet of the Exile,” *The Biblical World*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (May, 1918), pp. 269-271, esp. p. 270.

²⁶⁵The Christian martyr should not be understood as categorically different from the same figure in Islamic tradition. In his book, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Thomas Sizgorich explains that the ascetic martyr shares similar functions in late ancient Islam and Christianity. In particular, he brings a message of militant piety that denounces worldly affairs, embraces faith, and establishes a “monotheistic faith community” (pp. 159-160).

²⁶⁶Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, “The Martyr as Witness: Coptic and Copto-Arabic Hagiographies as Mediators of Religious Memory,” *Numen*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep., 1994), pp. 223-254, esp. p. 224-225.

²⁶⁷*Ibid*, p. 225.

By placing this definition of prophet as witness alongside Bobzin's work, we can identify the way in which the Qur'an draws a line between those who are identified as prophet (*nabī*) and those who are solely a messenger (*rasūl*). As opposed to a messenger, a prophet is entrusted with the more demonstrative role of living a life and carrying himself in a way that expresses the divine communication he is entrusted to share. While a messenger may only have a lone act of speech, a prophet's entire life becomes a testimonial for what he witnessed.

The Covenant and the Prophet

The spoken word and the verbal message of the prophet is the only evidence for the revelatory experience. Without proof for the existence of God, there "are only witnesses," therefore the "greatness of the prophet lies not only in the ideas he expressed, but also in the moments he experienced. The prophet is a witness, and his words a testimony."²⁶⁸ Prophets offer their speech as a testimonial account to the moment of experiencing the revealed God. Moreover, this testimony claims that the offer of prophecy is "a reminder that what obtains between God and man is not a contract but a covenant."²⁶⁹ While the conditions of a contract may be open to changing its stipulations according to time and circumstances, the covenant between man and God is unequivocal, and it can only be upheld or dissolved.

A covenantal agreement is associated with the unwavering law of political or religious hegemony, while a contract requires dynamic involvement from its participating body. For example, in Rousseau's social contract, each man is born free, but they "reach a point where the obstacles to their preservation in a state of nature prove greater than the strength that each man

²⁶⁸Ibid, p. 22.

²⁶⁹Heschel, *The Prophets: Part II*, p. 10.

has to preserve himself in that stage.”²⁷⁰ Once an individual realizes that he is unable to progress further in the state of nature, he enters into an association which “creates an artificial and corporate body composed of as many members as there are voters in the assembly, and by this same act that body acquires its unity, its common ego, its life, and its will.”²⁷¹ When an individual willingly steps out of a state of nature and into a contract with an association there emerges, what Rousseau calls, the “body politic,” or, the “republic.”²⁷² Every individual has a vote and, therefore, has the capacity to decide the degree of their involvement in the social pact of the Republic. This can be accomplished through voting assent, or, by default, in the instances when social participation in the state may come from each individual’s residential acquiescence. However, once the individual enters into the pact of the social contract, “the votes of the greatest number always bind the rest.”²⁷³ If an individual citizen of the state has an opinion which goes against the majority, it is because his opinion, not the general will, is in error.²⁷⁴ The social contract, therefore, is a form of collective participatory involvement and it is representative of the communal opinion.

The covenant of the Qur’an is comparable to the biblical usage of the concept, where an agreement is struck between a specific individual and God. The first covenant made in the Hebrew Bible is between God and Noah (along with the every living thing on the ark and all Noah’s children).²⁷⁵ The covenant states that God will never again cause a flood to destroy the

²⁷⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 59.

²⁷¹Ibid., p. 61.

²⁷²Ibid., p. 61.

²⁷³Ibid., p. 153.

²⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 153-4.

²⁷⁵Some theologians refer to an agreement between Adam and God, known as the ‘Edenic covenant,’ that is implicitly referred to as a covenant in the Book of Hosea 6:7. This agreement is based largely on the prohibition from eating from the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:16-17).

earth and it includes a sign (the rainbow), but there no conditions required from Noah for the realization of the covenant.²⁷⁶

Following Noah, the Abrahamic narrative describes two distinct covenants. The first covenant gives Abraham's descendants a very specific land, but, like the covenant with Noah, there are no stipulations; it is an unconditional covenant.²⁷⁷ The second Abrahamic covenant is referred to as an 'everlasting covenant' (*brit 'olam*) and it makes circumcision as the stipulation (and the sign) of the covenant. While this covenant is with Abraham's descendants as a whole, it can be nullified on an individual basis by failure of circumcision.²⁷⁸ Perhaps, the most notable biblical covenant is the Mosaic covenant. It is premised on the notion that in return for obedience to God's words, the Israelites will acquire the land of the Canaanites and continue to flourish.²⁷⁹ Like earlier covenants in the Hebrew Bible, the Mosaic covenant includes a sign of the agreement. In this case, Shabbat serves as the sign of the covenant.²⁸⁰

The covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses are all instances of God's agreement with a representative of a community. The covenant with Noah and the initial covenant with Abraham are different from the later covenant with Abraham and the Mosaic covenant, which include clear requirements for the perpetuation of the divine agreement. In addition, unlike a

²⁷⁶Gen. 9:8-11. Although Genesis does not place any stipulations on humanity as a result of the flood, Rabbinic tradition develops the "Noachide Laws" which are universal conditions meant to be integrated into all cultures and religious expressions. The seven Noachide Laws are found in many Rabbinic writings (e.g., Mekilta on Exodus 19:2; Sifre Deut sect.40; Sanhedrin 56a) and they include "the practice of equity in human relations and the prohibitions of blaspheming God's name, idolatry, sexual unchastity, bloodshed, robbery, and cruelty to animals, such as tearing off their limbs while they are still alive" (Ben Zion Bokser and Baruch M. Bokser, eds., *The Talmud: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) pp. 21-22). In regard to this general laws, Herman Wouk writes: "Nations and persons that live by these precepts are, in the Talmud's phrase, the righteous of the world" (Herman Wouk, *This is My God: The Jewish Way of Life* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1992) p. 20.

²⁷⁷Gen. 15:18-21.

²⁷⁸Gen. 17:2-14.

²⁷⁹Ex. 19-24.

²⁸⁰Ex. 31:12-17.

contract, these latter covenants do not leave room for unforeseen circumstances and/or conditions that offer an opportunity to reexamine the specifications of an agreement.

Precedence for covenantal relationship between sacred texts is found prior to the mention of the continuation of covenant in the Qur'an. In Jeremiah, there is the account of what would become known as the announcement of a new covenant:

“A new day is coming,” announces the LORD. “I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel. I will also make it with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their people long ago. That was when I took them by the hand. I led them out of Egypt. But they broke my covenant. They did it even though I was like a husband to them,” announces the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with Israel after that time,” announces the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people.”²⁸¹

The Gospels of Mark and Matthew refer to Jesus' connection to this New Covenant.²⁸² This recitation of the New Covenant from Jeremiah extends beyond the Gospels in the Book of Hebrews. Not only is there continuity from the covenant of the Hebrew Bible, but the New Testament claims to supersede the earlier contract: “But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.”²⁸³ As support for this claim of covenantal superiority this verse is followed by the lone long quotation of the covenant passage from

²⁸¹Jeremiah 31:31-33.

²⁸²See Mark 14:24 and Matthew 26:28.

²⁸³Hebrews 8:6.

Jeremiah 31.²⁸⁴ The development of the covenant between the Book of Jeremiah and the New Testament is indicative of the ways in which a covenantal connection may exist in an intertextual relationship.

Inside of the Hebrew Bible, a reference to an evolving covenant is not limited to chapter 31 of Jeremiah. In the Book of Isaiah it is written:

‘The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,’ declares the Lord. ‘As for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the Lord. ‘My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants – from this time on and forever,’ says the Lord.²⁸⁵

It seems that this comment on the status of the covenant is driven by the social condition described in Isaiah 24: “The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.”²⁸⁶ The notion that people are breaking the covenant and that a “Redeemer” will come with a message of repentance has obvious significance beyond Judaism and in the religious messages of Christianity and Islam.

In fact, the covenant is one of the most overt topics that reappears across Abrahamic sacred texts. Yet, in comparison with the Qur’anic relationship with the covenant, there is a crucial difference in the way in which the New Testament relates to the covenant. While the

²⁸⁴Hebrews 8:8-12. This recitation is offered in a brief format in Hebrews 10:16-17 and Romans 11:27. In addition, there is an allusion to Jeremiah 31 in 2 Corinthians 3:3 with a reference to an inscription on hearts, rather than on tablets.

²⁸⁵Isaiah 59:20-21.

²⁸⁶Isaiah 24:5.

Qur'an presents the past covenant as retaining its relevance and value, the New Testament states that this New Covenant supplants the past covenant of the Hebrew Bible.

The Qur'an reminds its reader that a contractual agreement remains binding and relevant. Specifically, the Qur'an states:

O ye who believe? When contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing. Let a scribe record it in writing between you in (terms of) equity. No scribe should refuse to write as Allah hath taught him, so let him write, and let him who incurreth the debt dictate, and let him observe his duty to Allah his Lord, and diminish naught thereof.²⁸⁷

Much of the focus on covenant in the Qur'an rests on the claim that covenant remains intact and relevant. With the assertion that God's contract is recorded in writing, there is the assertion that one should continue to follow their obligations. To this end, the same Qur'anic verse reminds the reader to "observe your duty to Allah," because "Allah is teaching you."²⁸⁸ The Qur'anic covenant is recorded in writing because there is an enduring obligation to observe its precepts.

The inclusion of twenty-one biblical prophets, who can all be located in the Judeo-Christian tradition, indicates that the Qur'an is part of a larger sacred history. In particular, the text serves as a reminder that, as Gwynne asserts, God "does not break his Covenant."²⁸⁹ As constant reminders, Gwynne explains that the prophetic stories have brevity and allusiveness because they serve as a "normative precedent," not as a protracted account, for making the case for Muhammad's place in the lineage of prophetic tradition.²⁹⁰ The Qur'anic argument asserts

²⁸⁷Q 2:282.

²⁸⁸Q 2:282.

²⁸⁹Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, p. 2.

²⁹⁰*Ibid*, pp. 32-33.

that there have been a number of prophets sent by God to offer reminders of the established covenant and that these prophets are known and revered by the Qur'anic audience. In fact, a fair number of Qur'anic stories rest on the literary convention of associating the moral good with the culturally familiar.²⁹¹ Therefore, prophetic accounts are just long enough for the reader or listener to verify familiarity with each prophetic personality and his role in the tradition of prophets delivering covenantal reminders.

Their stories are concise, but frequent because humans “must be constantly reminded that the coming of a prophet is not unprecedented. God has consistently sent prophets to inform them of the existence of their Creator and to remind them of their covenantal obligation to him.”²⁹² The Qur'an explains how one should understand and interact with the divine. In the Qur'an, it is the prophetic stories that provide instruction about the nature of the relationship between human and God. To this effect, Gwynne explains that in the “relationship between human beings and God, humans are required to adhere to the Covenant.”²⁹³ The duties of the covenant remain intact, and the relevancy of the covenant endures across time.

The divine commitment to keep His covenant is the reason for its durability and continued relevance. God's guarantee to preserve His covenant is evidenced by the Qur'anic quotation: “And they say: The Fire (of punishment) will not touch us save for a certain number of days. Say: Have ye received a covenant from Allah - truly Allah will not break His covenant - or tell ye concerning Allah that which ye know not?”²⁹⁴ A foundational aspect of this recurring Qur'anic topic is this reminder; the earlier covenant remains unbroken and relevant. More

²⁹¹Ibid, pp. 32-33.

²⁹²Ibid, p. 32.

²⁹³Ibid, p. 65.

²⁹⁴Q 2:80.

specifically, the covenant retains its integrity because God does not breach the precepts of His covenant.

All individuals decide whether or not they will follow the precepts of this covenant. This notion is picked up by Gwynne, who writes that “Islam, like Christianity and Judaism of Jeremiah’s ‘new Covenant,’ explicitly rejects the notion of collective punishment; thus reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience are tied to the acts of individuals, not communities.”²⁹⁵ As a consequence, each individual listener, or reader, becomes responsible for accepting the prophet’s message and keeping the covenant. With this responsibility, when one sins by straying from the covenant there will be punishment.²⁹⁶ Conversely, when one practices virtue by following the tenets of the divine pact, there will be recompense.²⁹⁷ Along with connecting individual action to a divine response, this balance between punishment and reward is an important reminder that the prophetic accounts are not purely punishment stories.

A sense of immediacy to the repercussions of each action serves to accentuate this individual responsibility. An example of this imminence of judgment for rejecting the covenantal message of the prophet can be seen in the stories of destroyed communities. For example, *surahs* 53 and 54 both provide details of punishment for denial. Along with these instances of punishment, are many examples of explicit curses: “upon Pharaoh and his people (Q 11:99, 28:42), upon ‘Ad (Q 11:60), upon Jewish violators (Q 4:46 and 5:64), and from the tongues of David and Solomon (Q 5:78).”²⁹⁸ Individuals may receive the consequence for breaking the covenant with instantaneous punishment and curses.

²⁹⁵Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, p. 14.

²⁹⁶Examples of punishment: Q 68:7-16 and 35-45; 1:7; 73:12-18; 87:11-13; 100:6-11; and 111:1-5.

²⁹⁷Examples of reward: Q 68:34; 73:19; and 87:9-10.

²⁹⁸Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, p. 17. Although Gwynne includes David alongside Solomon in this description of curses, it should be noted that the Qur’an only includes David. Solomon is not mentioned in the referenced Qur’anic verse.

The responsibility for adhering to the covenant, and the culpability for failing the tenets of the contract, falls on each individual human because God does not break his word. For example, the Qur'an states, "Allah faileth not His promise."²⁹⁹ The idea that God's covenant stretches across time is similar to the Jewish concept of *l'dor va'dor* ("from generation to generation"). One of the textual points of reference for this idea comes from Psalms: "But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children— with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts."³⁰⁰ In Jewish custom, there emerges the idea that traditions should be remembered and passed across generations to ensure the continuation of belief and practice. The Qur'anic perspective builds on this concept by stating that, although many may forget the divine contract, the covenantal agreement with God remains intact across time and tradition.

The way in which the Qur'an offers continuity from an earlier covenant offers an answer to the questions long posed by scholars writing from Jewish and Christian perspectives:

“[W]hy are most Qur'anic accounts of Biblical characters and events so allusive, discontinuous, and formulaic when compared with the versions in the earlier scriptures? Why do they sometimes differ?”³⁰¹

While the Qur'an is a unified work, it is not a continuous narrative in the tradition of other Abrahamic sacred texts. Rather, while “the Old Testament presents the Covenant and the efforts made to fulfill or avoid it; the Qur'an demonstrates that the Covenant remains in force, and that

²⁹⁹Q 30:6.

³⁰⁰Psalms 103:17-18

³⁰¹Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, p. 2.

every generation must strive anew to understand it.”³⁰² The Qur’an utilizes its audience’s familiarity with Judeo-Christian ‘stories,’ and the manner in which God interacted with humanity in the Abrahamic covenantal tradition, to remind, rather than initiate, the precepts of the Covenant.

The importance, as a literary convention, of a reminder or memory appears throughout the Qur’an in the form of the verbal root *dh-k-r* (e.g., Q 68:51-52; 80:11-12; 53:29; 73:19; 89:23; 77:5; 88:21; 89:23; and 87:9-10, 15, 18-19). While this verbal root is often translated as “to remember” or “to recall,” it also means “to speak” or “to quote.” Through the range of meanings associated with this verb, the Qur’an utilizes dialogue inside the text, and quotations of prophets from outside the text, as invocations of remembrance. These calls to remember urge humanity to recall the features of covenant. Additionally, these reminders illustrate that the Covenant between humanity and God remain intact and remove the necessity of precise reiterations of previous covenantal stories.³⁰³

In their definition of covenant, Mendenhall and Herion notice that the Arabic root *dh-k-r* is a cognate of the Hebrew verb *z-k-r* (‘to swear’ or ‘invoke’). The common root transmits additional concepts such as “to swear” and “to invoke.”³⁰⁴ In Jewish liturgy, the Hebrew root is seen in the *yizkor* memorial service for the dead, which “was introduced into the Jewish liturgy during the medieval period of pogroms” and may be translated as “‘Recalling the Dead.’”³⁰⁵ This service was included in the Jewish tradition prayer with the notion that the individual Jew

³⁰²Ibid, p. 4.

³⁰³Ibid, p. 18.

³⁰⁴G. Mendenhall and G. Herion, “Covenant,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed., D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 1198.

³⁰⁵Joel S. Shavishinsky and Howard Wimberley, “The Living and the Dead: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Jewish Memorial Observances,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4 (Jul.-Oct., 1992), pp. 281-300, esp. p. 285.

“may pay homage to his forbears and recall...traditional goals.”³⁰⁶ In an example from the past century, *Yizkor* books in post-Holocaust Jewish intellectual activity refer to “the literary attempt to remember and recollect the life of destroyed communities and loved ones.”³⁰⁷ Writers like Abraham Heschel and Joseph Solovetchik had a sense that a significant Jewish civilization was destroyed by the Holocaust and “it was the sacred duty of the remnant that survived to preserve the history of this civilization.”³⁰⁸ Within the shared space of language, this root invokes the current members of a religious community to remember past generations and to preserve the traditional objective of allegiance to God.

Unsurprisingly, the call to remember the tenets of the covenant exists in the Hebrew Bible as well. To remind the Israelites of their contract with God, the text recites past events that indicate God’s enduring pact with the Israelites. “Remember the days of old; understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father and he will relate to you, your elders and they will tell you that.”³⁰⁹ As a common biblical theme, the centrality of the urge to remember is addressed by Otto Michel, who writes that a “basic element in OT piety is that man remember the past acts of God, His commandments and His exhausted possibilities.”³¹⁰ For example, in Deuteronomy it states: “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”³¹¹ The Hebrew Bible also tells the Israelites not to forget the commands of the covenant: “You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves

³⁰⁶Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, 1969), p. 196.

³⁰⁷Morris M. Faierstein, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Gershon Jaconson, “Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Holocaust,” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1999), pp. 255-275, esp. p. 259.

³⁰⁸*Ibid*, p. 259.

³⁰⁹Deuteronomy 32:7.

³¹⁰Otto Michel is quoted in Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, p. 19.

³¹¹Deuteronomy 8:2.

by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God.”³¹² The relevance of the covenant endures when there is the remembrance of the commands and events associated with the divine pact.

Regarding the centrality of the covenant to the Qur’anic narrative, Gwynne asserts that the “relation between God and humanity is called the Covenant, and...it is the logical key to the entire structure of Qur’anic argument. Virtually every argument in the Qur’an expresses or implies one or more of the covenantal provisions.”³¹³ Moreover, Gwynne argues that “the Covenant *as a discrete concept* does not have a clear profile in Islamic scholarship” because it is so intrinsic to the Qur’anic message.³¹⁴ As textual evidence for this claim, the pivotal covenant-passage is Q 7:172:

And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. (That was) lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! of this we were unaware.³¹⁵

Rather than a simple communal heritage, acceptance of the covenant is something which each individual accepts. Along the lines of Heschel’s description of prophetic communication, each prophet shares the offered covenant through testimonial declaration.

While the covenant as a distinct idea is not displayed in the Qur’an, the role of prophecy is a conspicuous element of Qur’anic narrative claims. Through prophecy, the Qur’an displays

³¹²Numbers 15:39-40.

³¹³Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, pp. 1-2.

³¹⁴Ibid, p. 4.

³¹⁵What Pickthall translates as “reins” (*zuhūr*) could also be translated as “surface” or “rear side.”

the importance of covenantal remembrance. Gwynne explains that the “Prophet’s role is partly defined as being God’s surrogate on earth, thus strengthening his position and the obligation to obey him: twenty-six times people are commanded to ‘Obey God and the/His Prophet.’”³¹⁶ The complete obedience that one has for God and His covenant is extended to a call for utter adherence to the divine messenger. To illustrate this, the Qur’an states that “Whoever obeys the Apostle has obeyed God.”³¹⁷ As a consequence, compliance with God’s covenant is conflated with heeding each, and every, prophet’s call to remember.

Individual acceptance of the covenant is predicated on the delivery of the prophet’s account, or testimony, to the community, announcing the establishment, or continued relevance, of the covenant. The Qur’anic prophet receives (or what Heschel calls the “turning”) the covenant and he announces (or the act Heschel calls the “direction”) this covenantal agreement to his community. The receipt of a divine covenant connects Qur’anic prophets: “And when We exacted a covenant from the prophets, and from thee (O Muhammad) and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant.”³¹⁸ In this way, covenantal receipt indicates a uniform experience among individual Qur’anic prophets. Moreover, by alerting his surrounding society to the direction of the received covenant, the prophet acts as a witness (*shahīd*) to the traditional Abrahamic covenant (Q 22:78) and as a witness to the community receiving the covenant (Q 2:143). Therefore, the prophet in the Qur’an receives a covenant, then serves as a witness among his designated audience, or community. His testimony to the community is the announcement of the social obligation associated with the covenant.

³¹⁶Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an*, p. 190.

³¹⁷Q 4:80

³¹⁸Q 33:7.

This is not, however, the only connection shared by Qur'anic prophets. As a consequence of, or a precondition to, receiving and sharing God's covenant, Qur'anic prophets share characteristic similarities. Gwynne explains that prophets, as a distinct category, share a similarity in type as follows:

A major component of the definition of a prophet is that he is a human being (Q 14:11, 18:110, 41:6), that is, not an angel (Q 6:50) but of the same genus as their audience. As humans, the prophets were raised from among their own people (Q 12:109), spoke their language (Q 14:4), had wives and children (Q 13:38), ate food (Q 21:8), and walked in the markets (Q 25:7). Their opponents, however, seized upon this similarity and used it to argue against them. With such people, the prophets' very humanity discredited them, let alone their similarities to and associations with the physically or politically disadvantaged, such as Moses's (putative) speech defect (Q 43:52), his and Aaron's membership in an oppressed minority (Q 23:47), Lot's sexual morality as contrasted with the prevailing standard (Q 7:80-82) and Noah's following among the lower classes (Q 11:27). Prophets should have *some* kind of sign (Q 21:5, 17:90-93). Real messengers from God, thought Pharaoh, should be angels with showers of gold bracelets (Q 43:53, 23:24); that is, prophets should be less like humans and more like gods.³¹⁹

Like the audience that receives his message, the prophet in the Qur'an must be human. This commonality with his community may make him a target of persecution from among his listening audience. It is the vocation that separates a prophet from those around him. The

³¹⁹Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, pp. 114-115.

prophet becomes a *shahīd*, or witness, and must give testimony to an audience that is often characterized by hostility. Consequences of this persecution are the tension, debate, and confrontation that are frequent elements of the communication depicted between the prophet and his community.

Not only does the Qur'an assign a similarity of type to the prophet, it also explains what a prophet is not. Difference genus types are mentioned to delineate false notions from the prophetic character:

Many examples of differences can be found in the Qur'anic definitions of 'prophet,' particularly the relational, exclusionary definitions-those which say what a prophet is *not*. Unable to grasp the idea that a prophet is an ordinary mortal man who says extraordinary things, the prophets' audiences argue against them by assigning prophethood to a different class of beings. A prophet, in their view, *should* be an angel (e.g. Q 25:7) or at least a person of importance (Q 43:31). If not, his claims cannot be taken seriously, and he must be either abnormal in some way or a liar. He is not prophet but a soothsayer, a madman, a poet, or a forger (Q 52:29, 33); a lying sorcerer (Q 38:4); or the mouthpiece of a foreigner (Q 16:103, 41:44).³²⁰

Aside from the genealogical lineage (mentioned above), the prophetic character of the Qur'an is not biologically, financially, or socially different, or better, than his immediate audience that is reluctant to accept his message. However, the extraordinary experience of receiving a covenant

³²⁰Ibid, p. 132.

and the tribulations associated with sharing this covenant do make the prophetic character a type unto itself.

The Prophet as Hero

The accounts of the prophet sharing the covenant with his community, and the challenges he faces, give the Qur'anic prophets a heroic portrayal. Moreover, their heroic role offers a sense of historical relevance to a dynamic present and the view of an uncertain future. With the assumption that the first recitations of the text were within a society rich in oral tradition, the Qur'anic habit of shifting verb tenses add a sense of immediacy to these accounts of prophetic encounters from the past and their warnings about the future. In his study of oral tradition as historiography, Jan Vansina discusses how individuals in oral societies understand the past from the perspective of the present. From this viewpoint, the listener understands the past as a chaotic existence which elicits a response embodied by "culture heroes who create order and invent or make institutions appear."³²¹ Vansina borrows from the work of J. Middleton when he shows that the use of the culture hero in oral tradition helps to create an image of the past that is "homeostatic to the present." This past represents one possible direction that the present can take. The connection between the past and present in oral tradition continues in a "sequence of greater or lesser culture heroes" where each new "invention is merely apportioned to a culture hero."³²² Thus, the role of this culture hero in the oral tradition is twofold: 1. He must establish a sense of order through an invention or institution. 2. His role in history must be shown to be directly related to the contemporary time. In the Qur'anic narrative, the cultural hero is the prophet who attempts (with varying degrees of success) to establish, or affirm, an institution

³²¹Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 131.

³²²Ibid, p. 131.

from the revelation he shares and whose twofold role is meant as a response to the chaos of the recited past and the uncertainty of the immediate future.

Charles Torrey asserts that “Mohammad’s heroes of the past are almost all designated by him as ‘prophets.’”³²³ Contentious issues of textual authorship aside, the Qur’an elevates the prophet to a heroic status by presenting him as the primary protagonist in the majority of the text’s climactic instances. Writing about the role of the hero in sacred literature and hagiography, Michel de Certeau asserts:

The same features and the same episodes are passed along from one proper name to another; from all of these floating elements, like an array of words and jewels, the combinations make up a given figure and charge it with meaning.³²⁴

The attribution of recurring deeds and dialogue to an individual is a clear indicator that points to the heroic character within a given narrative.

This repetition of heroic performance is not just relevant to understanding an individual in the narrative, but also to how the Qur’an understands itself. De Certeau writes that a “text refers to *itself* by focusing its portrayal of the hero around constancy, the perseverance of the same.”³²⁵ In the Qur’an, the recurrence of similar characteristics in different prophetic heroes points to how understanding the ubiquity of the prophet is a helpful point of leverage for grasping a better understanding of the text, as a whole.

³²³Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933), p. 67.

³²⁴Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 276.

³²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 277.

Writing more generally about the character of the hero, Morton Smith and Moses Hadas explain how the expression ‘hero’ “denotes preternatural potency of some sort associated with a dead man.”³²⁶ The relationship between hero and death is intrinsically important, as the word hero “originally, in its technical sense...meant little more than ghost.”³²⁷ The death of the hero plays into the notion that it is “only persons who had wrought or suffered in some extraordinary way and had thereby significantly enlarged the humanity [who] are dealt with as heroes.”³²⁸ A hero will be called upon by a later individual as a means to assert potency and to evoke aid or inspiration in the field of the individual’s own achievement.³²⁹ For the heroic portrayal of the prophet, the Qur’an establishes a symbolic death of the prior prophet. The fact that there is the need for Muhammad to deliver a reminder of the past covenant is indicative of the figurative passing of previous prophets. With this symbolic death, the recollection of the prophet’s endeavors serves to evoke aid and inspiration for the argument that Muhammad is now the deliverer of the covenantal message.

As mentioned above, the Qur’an states that there is prophetic uniformity in vocation and function.³³⁰ Nonetheless, certain prophets have a more pivotal role in the Qur’an. John Wansbrough is correct in asserting that the quantity of references to certain prophets indicates the way in which particular prophetic stories are more developed. Specifically, the Qur’an mentions Moses (502 verses in 36 *surahs*), Abraham (245 verses in 25 *surahs*, and Noah (131 verses in 28 *surahs*) more than the other prophets of the Qur’an.³³¹ Along with Jesus, Joseph, Lot, Solomon and, perhaps, David, the centrality of their experiences in the overall structure of

³²⁶Moses Hadas and Morton Smith, *Heroes and Gods: Spiritual Biographies in Antiquity* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), p. 10.

³²⁷*Ibid*, p.10.

³²⁸*Ibid*, p. 10-11.

³²⁹*Ibid*, p. 11.

³³⁰See Q 2:285.

³³¹Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, pp. 48-9.

the narrative is the constant, and the most explicit, reminder of the experiences that are consistent with De Certeau's claim about the way in which the persevering heroic image responds to various situations in specific instances, while illustrating overarching textual themes.

While mentioned more than other prophet in the Qur'an, Moses is not meant to have vocational superiority over other Qur'anic prophets.³³² The Qur'an offers a sense of equality among the prophets:

We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered (Q 2:136).

In the Qur'an each prophet has a place of significance. However, as Charles Torrey explains, the Qur'an gives certain superior biblical prophets special distinctions or gifts. "Abraham was given Islam (2:126; 22:77); Moses was given The Book [*kitab*] (2:81); David was given the Psalms (4:161); Jesus was given the wondrous signs (*bayyināt*) and "the Spirit" (2:81, 254)."³³³ Moses' special gift is unique among the distinctions provided to the biblical prophets. In the Qur'an the prophets' distinctions are misinterpreted by Jews and Christians, but it is only Moses' gift that is broken. Specifically, the Qur'an states that the covenant, of the scripture, revealed to Moses was broken by the Jews (Q 5:12-3).

³³²Moses is not the only prophet who is presented with an elevated status of importance. Moses is vocationally superior to other prophets, but Abraham is genealogically more significant. As discussed below, Abraham's lineage is a criterion for the prophetic heritage and it is a family into which the believer decides to join.

³³³ Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933), p. 75.

In the Qur'an, the covenant revealed to Moses does not share the same vitality of Abraham's religion. The Qur'anic explanation of the Abraham's religion is described as *hanif*; a pristine monotheism that is neither Jewish nor Christian (e.g., Q 2:135 and 3:67). With a return to a monotheistic practitioner that chronologically precedes the Jewish law given by Moses and the gospel of Jesus, the Islamic monotheism presented in the Qur'an offers a return to a foundational presentation of belief in one God. As a consequence, Islam is not just the last in the line of revealed monotheistic traditions, it is also the first. In this way, the message of the Qur'an precedes and supersedes Judaism and Christianity.³³⁴

With this in mind, it is unsurprising to find a move in the Qur'an to supplant the Mosaic covenant with a return to a pristine conceptualization of the Abrahamic covenant.³³⁵ In their book, *Hagarism*, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook echo this point by asserting that the Qur'an depicts the covenant of Abraham as a challenge to the covenant of Moses.³³⁶ In support of this claim, the Qur'an explains that Moses received the scripture.³³⁷ However, after Moses receives this scripture, the Israelites alter the words of scripture.³³⁸ By changing the words of the message, the scripture of Torah is corrupted, and so is Moses' special distinction. In contrast to the living religion of Abraham, this corruption of scripture represents a symbolic death of Moses and his legacy. Through this death, Moses attains the heroic status placed on a select group of deceased individuals (as defined earlier by Hadas and Smith).

To build on the prophetic character as hero, inside the Qur'an, Moses best fits Joseph Campbell's paradigm of the hero who is blessed by the 'father' and "returns to represent the father

³³⁴For more on this concept, please see the summary of Abraham in chapter three.

³³⁵Examples of the return to an idealized vision of the religion of Abraham may be seen throughout the Qur'an (i.e., Q 2:135, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, and 16:123).

³³⁶Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

³³⁷See Q 2:53.

³³⁸Q 7:160-2.

among men.”³³⁹ Similar to the biblical narrative, in the Qur’an Moses goes from the “Children of Israel” to a meeting with God. During which, he receives revelations (*āyāt*) and returns to the community with tablets that represent the experience of the theophany.³⁴⁰ By fluctuating between divine and mundane encounters, the hero exists in a liminal space between receiving a sacred message from the father and sharing that sacred message with a profane community. Like the hero, not just Moses, but all prophets exist in a space caught between interacting with the father and representing the father to his community.

Outside of the Qur’an, in the tradition of Islamic exegetical writing, the experience of a prophet-father’s blessing to a prophet is clearly placed on Muhammad. In the description of his Night Journey (briefly described below), Muhammad returns from his celestial ascension with news of his encounter with his “father,” the prophet Abraham.³⁴¹ Moreover, some traditions have Muhammad encountering God and debating with Him about the prescribed number of prayers for his community. In this tradition, Moses is on a lower celestial sphere than the one where Muhammad encounters Abraham; Muhammad literally and figuratively ascends beyond Moses. Although there are some traditions that include Muhammad rising through the heavens beyond Abraham, there is the consistent positioning of Abraham above Moses. The implication of this encounter and prophetic placement in the celestial sphere is that Muhammad is turning to the initial message of Abraham, which predates Moses, and returning to his community in a heroic capacity that supplants Moses.

³³⁹Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 347.

³⁴⁰Q 7:134-150.

³⁴¹A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 186.

While the image of the father has been long associated with God, specifically, in the Qur'an it reads: "Remember Allah as ye remember your fathers or with a more lively remembrance."³⁴² This usage of the verbal root *dh-k-r*, as mentioned above, offers an etymological and ideological connection to the Jewish tradition of *yizkor*. The religion of Judaism is "suffused with metaphors of kinship, and it derives its charters of authority from genealogy."³⁴³ This is seen by the fact that in "the Old Testament, and in the commentaries on it, religious, priestly, and political authority are usually validated on a genealogical basis; there is, throughout, a strong consciousness of patrimony, family ties, history, and kinship obligations."³⁴⁴ A significant virtue of the covenant, which validates the specialness of the Jewish people, is that it is an institution passed down from the Jewish patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and subsequent recipients of the covenant).

With Jewish cultural developments in the Diaspora, reverence for ancestors becomes similar to the respect for the covenant. For example, "cultural and historical studies of European Jewry consistently reveal a belief in the efficacy of prayers directed to ancestral spirits as a means of obtaining help and guidance."³⁴⁵ However, as a liturgical standard, the content of *yizkor* indicates that Judaism "rejects the notion of direct *worship* of ancestors, and instead conceives of memorial prayers and observances" in a fashion derived from the commandment to honor your father and mother.³⁴⁶ The normative Jewish prayer develops in such a manner to ensure that reverence for one's ancestors does not threaten the primary allegiance to, and the singularity of, God.

³⁴²Q 2:200.

³⁴³Shavishinsky and Wimberley, "The Living and the Dead: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Jewish Memorial Observances," p. 284.

³⁴⁴Ibid, p. 284.

³⁴⁵Ibid, p. 286.

³⁴⁶Ibid, p. 285.

In the Qur'an, verses 26-7 of *surah* 43 represent a move to supplant familial paternal allegiance with a strict obedience to God, when the Qur'an reminds its reader of "when Abraham said unto his father and his folk: Lo! I am innocent of what ye worship. Save Him Who did create me, for He will surely guide me." To reiterate the importance of this divide between paternal and divine allegiance, this tension between Abraham and the traditions of the father are repeated in *surah* 26.³⁴⁷ By relinquishing the adherence to familial tradition, there is a stronger attachment to God (and His covenant). As the prophets serve as paradigms for correct belief, the relationship with the divine father is meant to supersede the genealogical father.³⁴⁸

In the living context of the Qur'an, the prophetic message of adherence to God's covenant superseded the veneration for an Arabian moral structure that was based on ancestral heritage. Bringing a message that was in conflict with normative belief is by no means exclusive to the Qur'anic covenant. As a general experience, the "role of the prophet was to be always at odds with the non-believing society, and his position could not be a 'virtuous' one when virtue was defined by such a society. Only a system of virtue rooted in the transcendent could make such socially non-conforming behavior a desirable model to heed or imitate."³⁴⁹ The Qur'anic prophets' appeal to a transcendent father supplants the affiliation to an immanent ancestral lineage.

In the second half of Campbell's model of the hero, the prophetic hero brings something back to the general community from an experiential encounter with God, the father. As in the Hebrew Bible, Moses in the Qur'an retreats from his community to receive the divine message in a place of solitude. Moses' return from the mountain with God's word provides an example of the

³⁴⁷Q 26:69-94.

³⁴⁸Interestingly, the beginning of the Abrahamic narrative in Genesis develops a similar process of disregarding a paternal connection for a divine one. Genesis 12:1 reads: "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country and your people. Leave your father's family. Go to the land I will show you.'" When the narrative continues and succinctly tells the reader that "Abram left, just as the LORD had told him" (Gen. 12:4), it is evident that faith in God, and His message, supplants paternal allegiance.

³⁴⁹Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an*, p. 58.

prophet hero representing the father among humankind.³⁵⁰ Ostensibly, it is the message of the covenant that is brought back to his audience. However, this retreat from, and return to, the human society is by no means peculiar to Moses. This removal from and return to civilization is part of the adventure of the hero which Campbell says follows the “pattern of the nuclear unit,” which is described as: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and life-enhancing return.³⁵¹ Thus, when the hero returns he must bring with him a remnant from the source of power that he encountered.

Heroes, holy men, and prophets share a pattern of behavior. They retreat from human society in the village to an encounter with God in the natural world. After which, these three figures eventually return to civilization and bring with them a vestige of the divine encounter. This pattern offers a sense of congruency in the trajectory of all three vocations. In *Hero and Hero Worship*, Thomas Carlyle writes about Muhammad as the preferred example of the prophet as hero, when he describes the hero as a “deep hearted Son of the Wilderness,” who “has this first distinction, which indeed we may call first and last, the Alpha and Omega of his whole Heroism, that he looks through the shows of things into ‘things.’”³⁵² For Carlyle, the hero prophet is characterized by an inherent wildness and an intrinsic inclination to inquire beyond the societally accepted answer of larger questions related to the Divine. In this way, a close connection to wilderness becomes synonymous with moving toward an intimate relationship with the Divine.

The notion of wildness associated with the hero could take many forms. The extended periods of isolation and dialogical relationship with a divine or spiritual entity are ways in which the wildness of the prophetic experience is most explicit. The prophet does not, however, remain

³⁵⁰In reference to Q 20:80; 7:150

³⁵¹Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p.35.

³⁵²Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841).

in the wild place of isolated interaction with the divine. Rather, the prophet returns to the domesticated environ of the normative social world, but the prophet brings with him a remnant of wildness, a divine message. The prophet, and the message he carries, serve as a bridge that connects the gulf separating wild and domestic space.

The Holy Prophet on the Periphery and in Society

The holy prophet-hero character has intense moments of introspection in the wilderness and back into a place in the communal experience of human society. Across religious traditions, the prophet is similar to the holy man, or the saint. A.J. Wensinck writes that “in many literary works the words ‘prophet’ and ‘holy one/saint’ [*Heilige*] or ‘righteous ones’ are synonyms.”³⁵³ The similarity between the two is most evident by the role they play inside of a given community. In his article, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” Peter Brown discusses the crucial position of the holy man in societies of the fifth and sixth centuries. During this contemporaneous period to the dawn of Islam and the initial environment of the Qur’an, the character of the holy man is characterized as a man of the mountain who takes to “the mountainside ‘to stalk his god.’”³⁵⁴ With the implication that a close connection to God is more attainable in the peripheries of societies, the holy man’s commitment to pursuing a communion with the Divine in the isolation of the rural mountainside placed him in “a world that was not so much antithetical to village life as marginal.”³⁵⁵ The holy man is not against all the tenets of village behavior. Rather, he willfully places his body in the village, while bringing with him vestiges from his relationship with his god. As a consequence, the holy man exists in a

³⁵³A.J. Wensinck is quoted in Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto,” p. 101.

³⁵⁴Peter Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Volume 61 (1971), pp. 80-101, esp. pp. 83-84.

³⁵⁵*Ibid*, pp. 83-84.

space between worlds. In this way, he “was the ‘stranger’ *par excellence*.”³⁵⁶ Neither completely feral nor completely tame, he exists between rural country and civilized society while attempting to merge the two. To bridge the geographic and conceptual space separating the encountered presence of God in the vast openness of the wilderness from the confines of the tight living quarters of the village, the holy man has the task of “making such a distant God relevant to the particularity of human needs.”³⁵⁷ The holy man brings the news of his encounter with God because he needs to allay the anxiety which fills society. With increased certainty there can be a decrease in apprehension about an unknown future, so the holy man shares the revelation that belief in his message can influence the final placement of a man’s soul in paradise, and disbelief could offer the alternative place in an inferno of punishment. In this way, corrective action has the power to dictate the direction of an individual soul.

Mediating the space separating a distant, but universal, God from the particular needs of a given village, belief from disbelief, and reward from punishment situates this holy prophet as being uniquely trained for the position of mediator, or arbiter. In consideration that the will of God is conveyed in the dialogue of the prophet, he is the medium through which the village is granted access to an interaction with God and an understanding of the ways to find favor in His eyes. Like the initial vocation of arbiter between warring tribes played by the Prophet Muhammad in the village of Medina (Yathrib), the holy man could also serve as mediator in a city filled with differing factions. As a stranger who sits outside of certain grievances particular to a given village, the holy man would have the ability to resolve tension and to prevent the eruption of violence.³⁵⁸ While the experiences of Muhammad and the sixth century holy man as village arbitrator is not common

³⁵⁶Ibid, p. 91.

³⁵⁷Ibid, p. 97.

³⁵⁸Ibid, pp. 89-92.

to all prophetic experiences, a consistent element of the prophetic vocation is to mediate the space between an individual experience of encountering the divine word in an isolated setting and communally sharing a newly acquired message with a village that is confined by its adherence to traditional beliefs and kin networks. It is the place of the holy prophet hero, then, to be alternatively attempting to communicate with a limitless God, on one hand, and a limited community, on the other.

Unsurprisingly, the experience of receiving a prophetic call is a pivotal moment in the life of an individual, but, of course, it is not the only experience in the life of any apostle. However, when reading the Qur'an it seems that, outside of the monumental moments or exceptional experiences, there is little else to the life of the prophet. With scant details about the life of the prophet, we are only provided information about the rite of passage instances. In his study of the recurring characteristics of the hero in folklore, Alan Dundes explains that the "most surprising things happen to our hero at birth; the most surprising things happen to him as soon as he reaches manhood, but in the meanwhile nothing happens to him at all."³⁵⁹ At the expense of exploring further biographic embellishments, the Qur'anic presentation of its prophets offers a depiction of birth and a child coming into manhood. For example, the Qur'an's most significant narrative about Jesus is his miraculous birth and ability to speak from the cradle.³⁶⁰ Similarly, the Qur'an recounts a coming of age story from Abraham's youth when he enters into manhood by standing up to the polytheism of his father and smashing the idols that were the object of devotion.³⁶¹ These instances point to the similarity between the series of events depicted in the presentation of the folkloric hero and the prophetic hero.

³⁵⁹Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 152.

³⁶⁰Q 19:16-34 .

³⁶¹Q 21:51-70.

Beyond these instances, the Qur'an adds two more ritually significant events to the delivery of the prophet's story. First, with the description of the prophet Solomon's death by the gnawing away of his supporting cane, the Qur'anic reader learns that, like the prophetic character's birth and coming of age, his death is extraordinary.³⁶² Through the death of the prophet, we also discover that just as God has complete power over a prophet's birth (i.e., the birth of Jesus in Q 19:35), He has complete control over a prophet's death. Unsurprisingly, God's clear control over a prophet's mortality from his birth to his death indicates an explicit power dynamic meant to indicate the degree to which ultimate power rests not with the messenger, but with God.

Nonetheless, it is not the birth, the passage into manhood, nor the death of the prophet which receives the majority of the material dedicated to depicting the prophets. Rather, the focus of the Qur'an's recitations of past biblical heroes is on what we could call the prophetic initiation process. To a degree, this ritual event is analogous the "examination" that a hero must pass before ascending to the throne.³⁶³ To pass the initiation process, the Qur'anic prophet must answer "Here I am" like the Biblical Abraham, rather than attempting to evade the call like the Biblical Jonah.³⁶⁴ Unlike the range of prophetic responses in the Hebrew Bible, Qur'anic prophets answer the call to prophecy. In fact, aside from Solomon's preference of material wealth to obedience to God (i.e., Q 38:32), the prophetic initiation process of the Qur'an is predicated on the prophet's acceptance of, and obedience to, God's message.

The process itself is made from the two elements Heschel labels the "turning" and the "direction" (see above). First, there is the receipt of the message from God. Second, there is process during which the prophet shares the message with his audience. The Qur'an does not

³⁶²Q 34:14

³⁶³Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, p. 153.

³⁶⁴See Gen. 22:1, 11, and Jonah 1:3.

require successful completion of the prophetic initiation process. That is, the prophet is not mandated to have his entire audience believe his message; he is only required to accept and share the message. Interestingly, in most instances, the prophet is rejected by his own audience. Yet, it is the similar two part process of reception and diffusion of the new covenant that is the recurring scenario in the life of the prophetic character.

By limiting the presentation of a prophet's life to these most ritually significant instances, it appears that, like the 'hero' in Dundes' work, the Qur'anic prophet "is a figure, not of history, but of ritual."³⁶⁵ Without a larger, and possibly superfluous, narrative from which to explore the prophetic character and his unique personality, we are left with the brief, but crucial, heavily ritualized moments as our window into the Qur'anic prophet. The exclusion of the 'larger' story of the prophet may be attributed to a number of factors. From Dundes' perspective, the hero of tradition's story is about "his ritual progress, and it is therefore appropriate that those parts of his career in which he makes no ritual progress should be left blank."³⁶⁶ In this way, the Qur'an makes use of the portions of the prophetic story that serve to illustrate each prophet's place in the uniformity of the prophetic character.

Without the ancillary, and lesser important, narrative details that could only steal attention away from the central elements of the prophetic experience, the Qur'an offers a recurring scenario of dialogue between prophet and God and dialogue between prophet and community. This pattern of experiences not only confirms the image of the prophet, it also reiterates time and again the delivery of the Qur'an's central claims. The consistency of the prophet experience enables a dependable character to be responsible for the delivery of the covenantal message of the Qur'an.

³⁶⁵Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, p. 152.

³⁶⁶Ibid, p. 152.

Like the hero of tradition described in Dundes' work, the reliability of the prophetic character's experiences allows the Qur'anic reader to recognize a prophet by the recurring situations of ritual. The Qur'an uses descriptions of a miraculous birth, a significant entrance into manhood, the prophetic initiation process, and an extraordinary death to identify the prophetic character. These ritualized events indicate a similarity in the Qur'anic rendition of a prophetic character, but it is only with the dialogue attributed to the prophets that there emerges a sharper pattern in the prophetic character and, at the same time, a delineation of the individual personalities of each talking prophet.

Dundes critiques classical scholars for their disinterest in the actions and their intent focus on "the words which the poets have put into their mouths."³⁶⁷ This criticism is driven by Dundes' contention that many are "oblivious of the fact that the whole art of the great poets lay in putting new words into the mouths of old characters."³⁶⁸ Dundes asserts that an interest in the hero's dialogue is an endeavor into the realm of romanticism, but a systematic study of the hero's actions is a scientific work. While there is certainly art in the language of the speaking prophets, it is not sheer romanticism because it provides insight into revered figures and their contribution to the Qur'an. One can recognize that it is through attributed dialogue, not described action, that the biblical prophets of the Qur'an are established as heroes, and were understood as such in the initial environment of the Qur'an. Indeed, the strength of dialogue is that it enlivens these familiar characters.

In any learning relationship, there is an implicit (at least) power dynamic required for a student to accept a teacher and/or a lesson. The student presumes that the teaching has attained access to a knowledge source that the student has not encountered, or maybe will not encounter.

³⁶⁷Ibid, p. 157

³⁶⁸Ibid, p. 157

In the case of the Qur'an and its delivery in an environment where there was a great deal of respect for the traditions associated with the local Jewish and Christian communities, the presence of biblical prophets in the text increased the perceived authenticity of the new message. Therefore, a methodological analysis of the ways in which the Qur'an places new language in old biblical characters illustrates how adding new personalities to old characters offers a method for teaching an original lesson.

CHAPTER THREE

The Prophet as Personality

In the process of approaching the prophets of the Qur'an, there is a difference between the *prophetic character* and the *prophetic personality*. On the one hand, the prophetic character refers to the way in which the 'floating' attributes and experiences that land with, varying degrees of similarity, on the prophets of the Qur'an. These recurring attributes and experiences produce constancy in character through a shared vocation, similar experiences, and a consistent message. On the other hand, the prophetic personality denotes the distinct individuality that peeks out from the prophetic mold. The prophetic character is uniform, while the prophetic personality is unique.

The prophetic character and the prophetic personality should not be seen as mutually exclusive identities. In his work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman studies social interaction and the framing of social experience. According to Goffman, social exchanges allow for the demarcation of the boundaries of character (created or otherwise). To ensure that the limitations are established and maintained, when "two teams present themselves to each other for purposes of interaction, the members of each team tend to maintain the line that

they are what they claim to be; they tend to stay in character.”³⁶⁹ A prophet stays in character when he is portrayed as engaging a community of disbelievers, conversing with God, and talking with his kin network. Moreover, in regard to the anticipation of an individual’s role during social interaction, Goffman explains that when “a participant conveys something during interaction, we expect him to communicate only through the lips of the character has chosen to project, openly addressing all of his remarks to the whole interaction so that all persons present are given equal status as recipients of communication.”³⁷⁰ With the Qur’an, the reader, or audience, who hears the prophets’ attributed dialogue, presumes the content of the language is in accordance with the prophetic character. This expectation furthers the uniformity of the prophetic character. Nonetheless, inside the parameter of this uniform character there emerges a prophetic personality.

In spite of the expectation that everything said by the performer will be in keeping with the definition of the situation fostered by him, he may convey a great deal during an interaction that is out of character and convey it in such a way to prevent the audience as a whole from realizing that anything out of keeping with the definition of the situation had been conveyed.³⁷¹

While there are times when an individual personality emerges from the recurring features of prophets, this is done without undermining the integrity of the prophetic character.

³⁶⁹Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, New York, 1959), p. 167.

³⁷⁰Ibid, p. 176.

³⁷¹Ibid, p. 177.

The best way to categorize the prophetic character is in accordance with Torrey's assertion about "Muhammad's heroes" (mentioned above). The individuals that the Qur'an designates as prophets fit a uniform character as heroes of the Qur'an. The heroic status of the prophets is an elevated place from which these characters offer instruction to the reader. Like the general narrative of the Qur'anic text as a whole, the specific prophetic narratives serve a pedagogical function. For the reader to accept the text's claim on religious truth, it is essential that the Qur'an is able to successfully instruct or explain the claims that make up its central argument. In the Qur'an, God teaches man about his duty (Q 2:282). However, man does not receive instruction directly from God. Rather, the Qur'an explains that it is the messenger, or prophet, that recites the revelations and "teaches the Scripture and wisdom" (Q 2:151).³⁷² While the Qur'an's prophet character is didactic in design, it is through the prophet's instruction in correct words, beliefs, and deeds that the individuality of personality and method appears.

More than seldom stated actions and rarely described deeds, the dialogue of the Qur'an's prophetic narrative is the mortar that holds, and the façade that presents, the central arguments in the Qur'an. The conversers discuss issues related to belief, monotheism, the power of God, and adhering to the will of God. Through dialogue, the Qur'anic reader is exposed to these central tenets of the texts that are embodied in expressions from a unique cast of characters discussing these issues. The Qur'an uses prophets (the most frequent speaking character-type in the Qur'an) to issue recurring messages in continually different voices. For example, there are subtle differences in the personalities of the reticent of Moses (Q 26:12-14), the fearful Lot (Q 11:80), and the demanding Noah (Q 71:26-27). Each prophetic speaks with a particular voice to present a comparable message. Using different prophetic personalities to echo a similar series of

³⁷²Similar to Q 2:129; 3:164; and 62:2..

messages may be likened to having different teachers teaching a similar lesson. After a while, even the most stubborn of students will achieve understanding. By addressing the structure and content of dialogical situations the reader gains access to the differences in the individual natures of the prophets and the consistencies of their verbal content.

The Utility of Dialogue

The value of dialogue can be characterized four ways. First, within the more general context of storytelling, dialogue serves the interest of displaying the central points or claims of a narrative. In one of the earliest works on screenwriting, *A Practical Manual of Screenwriting*, Lewis Herman's explains that dialogue "can present the theme of the story."³⁷³ This is done with the way in which dialogue provides a continuity of images to any script, story, or text. As Herman states, one of the most "practical aspects of dialogue writing" is creating "a script that will result in a smooth-flowing picture."³⁷⁴ Dialogue serves to connect the images of seemingly distinct scenes and scenarios. In the effort of connecting a story with itself, pictorial continuity "can be aided considerably by a smooth flow in dialogue continuity. It can also be interfered with if continuity is lacking in the dialogue."³⁷⁵ By connecting scenes through dialogue, the consistent themes of the story are put into conversation with one another.

Second, along with adding continuity to the depicted images of a story, dialogue "also possesses the important function of characterizing the people in the story. For speech is revelatory. In one line, it can furnish a character's education, social status, occupation, country or state of origin, temperament, and emotional condition."³⁷⁶ More than third person narration or

³⁷³Lewis Herman, *A Practical Manual of Screenwriting*, 1952, p. 94.

³⁷⁴*Ibid*, p. 205.

³⁷⁵*Ibid*, p. 205.

³⁷⁶*Ibid*, p. 94.

described action, the dialogue attributed to a character in a story serves offer a full-bodied image of the constructed character. Alter asserts that the text allows “each character to manifest or reveal himself or herself chiefly through dialogue.”³⁷⁷ Moreover dialogue may be used to define “nuances of character and attitude.”³⁷⁸ Although he is writing about dialogue in the Bible, the same could be said about the Qur’an. While we learn about the central claims of the text through the attributed language of the Qur’anic prophets, it is with dialogue that the Qur’an broadcasts the personality of these emissaries of the narrative agenda.

Third, while dialogue’s ability to connect pictorial scenarios and to offer character development encourages the audience’s ability to process central themes, the length of attributed speech dictates the pace of described events. Herman explains:

“[T]here is almost no place in motion-picture dialogue for long speeches. A long speech impedes action. Short speeches increase it. Since action is the prime requisite of every filmic element, the short speech, in the main, should be adhered to.”³⁷⁹

Dialogue may be applied as a storytelling method that can increase or decrease the narrative tempo. With this in mind, the shorter speeches of prophetic characters in the Qur’an serve to ensure that the pace of the Qur’anic narrative unfolds in a brisk fashion.

Fourth, in the Qur’an dialogue is often presented, and elucidated, through conflict. Many dialogical situations in the Qur’an revolve around contesting notions of prophetic authenticity. According to Bakhtin, “dialogization” is the process through which discourse becomes

³⁷⁷Robert Alter, *On the Biblical Narrative*, p. 87.

³⁷⁸Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *A Literary Guide to the Bible*, pp. 19-20.

³⁷⁹Herman, *A Practical Manual of Screenwriting*, pp. 210-211.

relativized by opposing claims and definitions. Dialogue could exist in two forms: internal and external. When dialogue is externalized into a conversation between two or more parties, discourse becomes contested through competing assertions of authority. In contrast, when discourse is not placed into dialogue, language remains absolute or not up for debate.³⁸⁰

When parties debate over opposing positions, each side will use speech as a means to position a view over that of the competing body. In this process, speakers may “develop a variety of strategies to set up expedient positions in their quest to dominate the dialogue.”³⁸¹ The position of each speaker is illustrated through a number of claims, which may consist of “an account, an image or an analogy capable of persuasion by appealing to reasoning, emotion or faith.” These claims, in one form or another, are present in every discourse and they may be understood as “packages of contending arguments vying for listeners’ support.” Moreover, as Peleg explains, the “elucidation and articulacy of the argumentation process are heightened during conflict and disagreement.”³⁸² The use of competing claims allows for a more explicit and well developed argument. In this way, the dialogue that is uttered in the midst of conflict offers a cleaner view of expressed claims.

In summary, dialogue has value in four distinct, but not exclusive, functions. First, dialogue produces a series of images that connect sections of a narrative (even those sections that may appear disparate from a central narrative). Second, attributed speech develops the characterization of speaking actors. Third, dialogue may be used to control the pace of action. In particular, shorter dialogue increases the pace of the narrative. Fourth, the dialogue implemented during conflict offers an articulated representation of the views espoused by each

³⁸⁰Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 427.

³⁸¹Samuel Peleg, “Normative Dialogue in a Multi-Cultural Community: an Analytical and Practical Model,” *Peace Studies Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (August 2010), pp. 33-48, esp. p. 34.

³⁸²Ibid, p. 34.

party. Therefore, dialogue offers a valuable lens on how personalities are developed, action is heightened, and central claims are expressed.

Qur'anic Dialogue Types

Dialogue is a literary tool of the text that can be used to instruct the reader in the structure of the Qur'an's 'lesson plan.' However, dialogue comes in a number of forms. As a sufficient general definition, Mustansir Mir describes dialogue as a "significant verbal exchange that takes place between two or more parties in a given situation."³⁸³ Beyond that, and building on the work of Biblical scholar Robert Alter, Mir describes Qur'anic dialogue as a literary types that comes in seven variations. The seven types are as follows: (1) "dialogue between a prophet and the nation to which he is sent," (2) dialogue between God and one of His prophets, (3) a dialogue which revolves around moral edification, (4) a dialogue in which "the speakers are shown in consultation with one another, (5) a dialogue set in the hereafter, (6) one-sided dialogue," and (7) a dialogue in which "there are several speakers, but hardly any listeners."³⁸⁴ While Mir constructs these types for all the participants in Qur'anic dialogue (pharaoh, God, unnamed family members, etc.), this is a useful framework for approaching the more specific realm of prophetic dialogue.

One may question whether the creation of a list of types implies that verbal exchanges in the Qur'an can be so easily organized. In response, the varied types of dialogue cannot be easily categorized into a clean arrangement, but they can be grouped into types that point to recurring similarities. In regard to the description of the Qur'anic prophets, the differences in the

³⁸³Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 1-22, esp. p. 3.

³⁸⁴Ibid, pp. 9-10.

descriptions of the individual experiences allows for enough space to argue that while a type implies a connection through thematic and topical similarities, the verbal interactions of each prophet indicate a degree of independence from strict convention. The careful balance between adherence to vocational similarities and individual expressions provides the opportunity to meet a personality unique in detail, while adhering to a character history rich in form and function.

Although I would argue that the separation between types of dialogue is not always along the same boundaries that are provided by Mir, his list of descriptions of Qur'anic dialogue provides a valuable starting point for a more developed study of the prophetic subgenre of Qur'anic dialogue. So it is with the understanding that dialogue shapes and divides the overarching prophetic character that we engage this framework of the dialogical exchanges that involve prophets. While some of the varieties of dialogue in Mir's types are peculiar to the Qur'anic prophet, other types of dialogue are associated with ancillary Qur'anic characters and are, therefore, not of primary importance for a discussion of prophetic dialogue.

The first of Mir's types of dialogues is "between a prophet and the nation to which he is sent."³⁸⁵ This category of dialogue illustrates the recurring relationship between a prophet and his immediate community. Generally speaking, the nature of this type of dialogue is premised on repeated dynamics between the prophet and his audience. There are four elements that commonly flavor this verbal exchange: (1) the prophet reminds his audience that the covenant remains intact by describing the unity of God and warning about a coming day of judgment, (2) the audience often has a kin relationship with the prophet, (3) the prophet's message is spurned, and (4) as a consequence the prophet is socially marginalized, or isolated, from his listening audience, who will often receive a form of divine punishment. Many times, the ostracized

³⁸⁵Ibid, p. 9

prophet turns to God for consolation, and the second dialogical type (dialogue between God and one of His prophets) unfolds from the first in a most natural fashion.

In the Qur'an, this first type of dialogue is most common and it is often characterized by the prophet responding to the rejection of his community to criticize, or correct, the members of his audience.³⁸⁶ With the exception of Jesus, at least a portion of this listening audience consists of people who have a kin relationship with the prophet.³⁸⁷ Mir refers to the prophet's contemporary audience simply, and somewhat ambiguously, as a "nation."

However, Noah's audience, for example, can be divided between those who listened to his message and those who did not. The subtle, but important, differences in group identity help an understanding of the dialogue attributed to Qur'anic prophets. Robbins' use of Jeremy Boissevain's taxonomy of groups provides a way to approach the nature of this divide within the nation.³⁸⁸ Specifically, the two groups within this larger nation could be described as what Boissevain refers to as 'factions.' Generally speaking, Boissevain describes factions as "forms of social organization that are basic to any political process." As a specific social organization in a political process, a faction is

A coalition of persons (followers) recruited personally according to structurally diverse principles by or on behalf of a person in conflict with another person or persons, with whom they were formally united.... The central focus of the faction is the person who has recruited it, who may also be described as the leader.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶Ibid, pp. 9-10.

³⁸⁷In the dialogical instances of Q 19:30-33 and Q 43:63-65 Jesus' audience is made up of his 'disciples' (*hawariun*, a term which seems to be used specifically for Jesus' disciples).

³⁸⁸Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, pp. 100-1.

³⁸⁹Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 192.

In the dialogical situations of the prophetic narrative in the Qur'an the factions are made from the division among the listening audience. Quite simply, the factions in the prophet's audience are divided between those who follow prophet's message and those who do not. Moreover, as the leader of his faction, the prophet is responsible for speaking on behalf, of not just himself, but his faction of followers as well. As a consequence, he becomes the target of mocking abuse from the rival faction. A good example of the prophet speaking for his faction, and against the opposing faction, is Noah asking God to punish the disbelievers, while forgiving the believing members of his house (developed further in the following chapter).³⁹⁰

The recurring denial from the opposing faction situates the prophet as taking an argumentative stance against many of those in his audience, while also, at times, speaking in support of those members of his audience who adhere to his message. When the prophet shares the news of his message with the members of the surrounding audience, one response is to question the message and to put the prophet, himself, on trial. In this way, the prophet's dialogue directed against those contradicting members of his community takes the form of a testimonial account of what he witnessed during his divine encounter.

Without question, the second type of dialogue (between God and one of His prophets) is the most common in all varieties of prophetic experience. In its most fundamental expression, what is the prophetic experience but an instance of man communicating with the Divine? The perceived authenticity of a prophetic experience is premised on the transmission of a message from God to a particular person.

³⁹⁰Q 71:26-28.

In the dialogue between God and prophet, when God speaks to His prophet is divided from when a prophet speaks to God. The former is a precondition for the legitimacy of prophecy (an authentic prophet must have received a message from God), while the latter may be developed beyond dialogue and into the realm of prayer. Although not mentioned by Mir, the dialogical instances of a prophet speaking to God, in particular when a prophet initiates the conversation and calls out to God, can be seen as a sub-type of this second type of prophetic dialogue. This particular type of dialogue can be developed beyond conversation and into the realm.

The initiation of the traditional prophetic experience is evident in the instances when God calls out to His prophet. The prerequisite for the authenticity of prophecy is that the person is ‘God inspired.’ Conversely, the inauthentic prophet is not inspired by God. In this case the voices in his head are just that, and he is labeled as a *majnūn* (a “madman”); a common criticism directed against prophets in the Qur’an.³⁹¹

However, when it is the prophet who turns to God, the dialogue exists in a liminal space between prophecy and prayer. Thomas Carlyle describes Muhammad’s last words as “a prayer; broken ejaculations of a heart struggling up, in trembling hope, towards its maker.”³⁹² While the prophetic character has already received his Divine mandate, he remains a man who, like many men, will turn to His creator for comfort, understanding and/or wish fulfillment. In her article, “Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam,” Annemarie Schimmel, defines prayer as “an intimate conversation between man and God which consoles [*sic*] the afflicted heart even if it is not immediately answered.”³⁹³ According to Schimmel, the call, not the divine answer, is

³⁹¹See Q 26:27, 44:24, 51:39, 51:5, 54:9, and 68:51.

³⁹²Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*.

³⁹³Annemarie Schimmel, “Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam,” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (1952), pp. 112-125, esp. p. 112.

what describes prayer. The words and the pace of the specific call, however, is what inform us about which type of prayer is being described. The prayer could be pleading, thankful, or accusatory in nature. In form, according to Abraham Heschel, when a Qur'anic prophet calls to God it is a mystical type of prayer. In an interesting criterion to divide a prophet from a mystic, Heschel explains that the "mystic experience is man's turning toward God; the prophetic act is God's turning toward man."³⁹⁴ Therefore, the record of the Qur'anic prophetic character initiating conversation and calling out to God offers a sense of a mystical moment between God and man. Moreover, these moments of prayer precede the strict codification of the language that is used in the liturgical process and therefore offers a record of prayer in its rawest theological form.

On the one hand, language in sacred texts is meant to enliven belief and incite action. On the other hand, liturgy is meant to provide a ritualized reminder of the connection between believers and believed. However, as I. Abrahams asserts, the "inevitable result of a fixed liturgy is rigidity. The fixation of times and seasons and formulae for prayer does tend to reduce the prayer to a mere habit."³⁹⁵ With the inflexibility of a set procedure, there is the possibility for a monotonous routine that loses the initial intention of prayer. At its core, prayer could be understood as "the human attempt to realize God's will and the human confession of inability to realize that will."³⁹⁶ With that in mind, if "prayer is to mean anything it must retain its spontaneity. And therefore the Rabbis did their utmost to counteract the inherent weakness of a settled liturgy."³⁹⁷ As a means to infuse meaning and significance into the liturgical practice,

³⁹⁴ Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955) p. 198.

³⁹⁵I. Abrahams, "Some Rabbinic Ideas on Prayer," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jan., 1908), pp. 272-293, esp. p. 281.

³⁹⁶Ibid, p. 282.

³⁹⁷Ibid, p. 281.

sparks of sacred text language are included in the prescribed prayer cycle. The shift away from a temple based Judaism, where sacrifice exhibited the “single legitimate mode of Jewish covenantal worship,” created a need for the activity of covenantal remembrance through the ritual of prayer.³⁹⁸ As a consequence, the daily Jewish prayer cycle is replete with the work of the early rabbinic sages who inserted scriptural citations from the Tanakh. For example, the central Jewish prayer, the *‘amidah*, begins with the recitation of Exodus 3:15: “God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.” Beginning this central daily prayer with this particular textual citation illustrates “covenantal language derived from God's eternal name revealed to Moses.”³⁹⁹ For the individual familiar with Torah, the reference to the patriarchal connection to God evokes a recollection of the preceding verse where God initiates the covenantal relationship with Moses. Therefore, with biblical insertions, the routinized experience of prayer is broken by, seemingly, spontaneous scriptural recollections that serve to offer spontaneity and reminders of God’s covenant with His people.

Within Islam, there are examples of scriptural insertions, in the form of Qur’anic *surahs*, into the liturgical cycle. Inside of the five daily prayer cycles, there are a number of obligatory *raka ‘āt*, or prescribed words and movements which are followed when praying to God. Central to each individual *rak ‘ah* is the required recitation of the first Qur’anic *surah*, *al-Fatihah*. Depending upon the time and the tradition, additional *surahs* may be recited.

While the intent may be to enliven the practice of, and to add directed intention to, the prayer cycle, the redundancy of repetitive behavior has the capacity to diminish even the most powerful scriptural language. In the tradition of mystical Judaism, correct intention behind

³⁹⁸Ruth Langer, “Revisiting Early Rabbinic Liturgy: The Recent Contributions of Ezra Fleischer,” *Prooftexts*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1999), pp. 179-194, esp. 182.

³⁹⁹*Ibid* p. 185.

liturgy and action takes a central importance through the concept of *kavvana*, “i.e. mystical attention or concentration.”⁴⁰⁰ David Blumenthal refers to this idea as “The Art of Spiritual Consciousness-Raising.”⁴⁰¹ The purpose of *kavvana*, as a consciousness-raising technique, is to “change an act from a routine, or semi-conscious, act into an experience in which one is more fully present and more fully aware of the realities touched.”⁴⁰² For Heschel, arriving at a level of correct intention and awareness through *kavvana* is as important “to the service of God as impartiality of judgment is to scientific investigation.”⁴⁰³ Therefore, as opposed to the ideal approach to scientific inquiry which should be divorced from emotional intent, the approach to serving God should be attached to a very specific type of emotional intent.⁴⁰⁴

A conceptual similarity with *kavvana* is found with the Islamic mystical term, *himmat*. In his book, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran*, Chad Lingwood defines *himmat* with a number of different terms. According to Lingwood, *himmat* may be translated as “power of concentration,” “spiritual energy,” or “spiritual concentration.”⁴⁰⁵ By any definition, it can be seen as a “Sufi technical term related to the idea that Sufis could effect changes in fortune.”⁴⁰⁶ Therefore, alongside the well-known concept of *baraka* (spiritual charisma), *himmat*, as “the concentrated creative energy of the Sufi’s heart,” endowed “Sufi mystics with the ability to change dynastic fortunes.”⁴⁰⁷ Or, in a less imperial context, through *himmat* “a Sufi sheikh could direct his disciples without being physically present.”⁴⁰⁸ While *himmat* is used to describe a

⁴⁰⁰Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken, 1995), p. 34.

⁴⁰¹David Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader Volume II* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1982), p. 112.

⁴⁰²Ibid, p. 112.

⁴⁰³ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 387.

⁴⁰⁴This focus on intent is similar to the Islamic concept of *niya*, where the intention behind an act or ritual is of the utmost importance.

⁴⁰⁵Chad Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 10, 21 and 143.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid, p. 84.

⁴⁰⁷Ibid, p. 59.

⁴⁰⁸Ibid, p. 163.

wider range of spiritual capacities than *kavvana*, the two terms share a spiritual space revolving around an intense consciousness-raising focus.

This method of emotionally directed awareness-raising can be applied to the accomplishment of any commandment (as it is attested in the rabbinic texts of late antiquity), but it usually applies to the required mindset for prayer. The potential for redundancy to reduce the efficacy of the correct mindset of the pious actor is echoed by Rabbi Eliezer, who said “One who makes one’s prayers fixed, that person’s prayers are not sincere petitions.”⁴⁰⁹ With time, repetition of recitation, and the inclusion in an institutionalized liturgical cycle, the power of textual presentation may be minimalized. With this in mind, the transcript of the prophet conversing with God contains elements of spontaneity and individuality that may resonate emotionally because it is a prayer unrestricted by prescribed convention.

While the speech from the prophet to his audience is a testimony for arguing the case of the covenant, the speech shared between a prophet and his God may be categorized as a form of prayer. In the sense that prayer in its highest expression is an attempt at engaging God in conversation, the direct encounter of dialogue between God and his prophet may be contextualized as prayer. Best known for his pioneering work in defining and preventing further acts of genocide, Raphael Lemkin describes prayer as dialogue “based on the covenant.”⁴¹⁰ Individuals engage in dialogue during prayer to understand the covenant, or their “contract for life and righteousness.” In a manner greater than a normal contract, “a covenant must be defended, argued, explained.”⁴¹¹ What is being explained? More often than not, there is the human endeavor to explain why one’s actions are within the boundaries of the covenant, and are,

⁴⁰⁹Mishnah Berakhot 4:4.

⁴¹⁰Donna-Lee Frieze, ed., *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 53.

⁴¹¹*Ibid*, p. 53.

therefore, worthy of redemption. Through the clarification and defense of a covenant, the language of prayer becomes “like a personal tale,” or an “an intimate story told to somebody in confidence” where it becomes “as if all the contents of the soul are expressed verbally.”⁴¹² This intimate expression of dialogue becomes a fluctuation between a partial silence filled with listening and a rising crescendo filled with “persuasion, solicitation, a delicate murmur of explanation.”⁴¹³ This is a plea for divine forgiveness because, as I. Abrahams states, “prayer is at highest a cry for mercy.”⁴¹⁴ With the sincerity and the humility required for the plea for clemency, “one could see a man’s whole life in his prayer. It is a personal, bilateral, quasi-contractual relationship that brings a man face to face with his God”⁴¹⁵ Prayer consists of the arguments and explanations necessary to define, or understand, the boundaries of a covenant.

However, more than that, sincere prayer results in an honest dialogical expression of an attempt at an intimate relationship. Writing about Islamic mystical prayer, Schimmel states that “the essence of prayer is not in the petitioning and asking, its essence, on the contrary, is everlasting praise.”⁴¹⁶ Along those lines, from the perspective of Evelyn Underhill, worship is “the homage paid by the soul to its origin.”⁴¹⁷ When viewed from the contention that prayer is a soul offering praise to its source of existence, prayer becomes an attempt at increased intimacy with God.

Conceptual ideas regarding theological relations between human and God may mirror those found in psychological relations between humans. That being said, it is often the case that traditional notions of power dynamics diminish in the pursuit of the intimacy. In the case of

⁴¹²Ibid, p. 53.

⁴¹³Ibid, p. 53.

⁴¹⁴Abrahams, “Some Rabbinic Ideas on Prayer,” p. 282.

⁴¹⁵Frieze, ed., *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin*, p. 48.

⁴¹⁶Schimmel, “Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam,” p. 116.

⁴¹⁷Evelyn Underhill is quoted in Schimmel, “Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam,” p. 116.

sincere prayer, I. Abrahams notices that “while the mind appreciates that the only prayer should be praise, the heart is not satisfied by eulogizing God. Through the whole history of human life runs the cry for mercy.”⁴¹⁸ Rather than lauding divine power, individuals, “irrespective of creed,” will “all appeal to God's mercy.”⁴¹⁹ Examples of Qur’anic prophets calling out for God’s mercy are mentioned below. In return, God grants them mercy. In light of this, it could be said that the “The righteous are they that strengthen God; they help him to be merciful.”⁴²⁰ To explain how the righteous bring forth divine mercy, I. Abrahams writes: “Why are the prayers of the righteous symbolized as a spade? Just as the spade turns the grain from place to place, so the prayers of the righteous turn the divine attributes from the attribute of wrath to the attribute of mercy.”⁴²¹ Although Islamic theology does not develop a well-developed system of thought that may be analogized to the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* (where the individual adherent may influence God and the world), the Qur’an states that God hears prayer: “And your Lord hath said: Pray unto Me and I will hear your prayer.”⁴²² In this way, there may not be an influential aspect, but there is interactive elements to the Qur’anic notion of prayer and worship.

Interestingly, alongside the appeal for mercy, there are also many examples of Qur’anic prophets requesting God’s justice in the form of punishment. The simultaneous (as is the case with Noah detailed below) call for divine mercy and justice illustrate, what I. Abrahams calls, “a peculiar Rabbinic dualism-the Mercy and the Justice of God.”⁴²³ When the prophet speaking with God fluctuates between these opposing sides of God, we get a sense of the range of the verbal interaction between prophet and God. From a theological perspective, it may be claimed

⁴¹⁸Abrahams, “Some Rabbinic Ideas on Prayer,” p. 286.

⁴¹⁹Ibid, pp. 286-287.

⁴²⁰Ibid, p. 287.

⁴²¹Ibid, p. 287.

⁴²²Q 40:60.

⁴²³Abrahams, “Some Rabbinic Ideas on Prayer,” p. 287.

that it “is the fear of God that gives virtue to prayer” and that a “praying man is in the divine presence.”⁴²⁴ However, even in the company of God, the Qur’anic prophet, who is not struck silent by terror, works from a social construct where he is comfortable defining the nature of the relationship, or covenant, between God and the individual human.

Although Lemkin claims that the “Jewish religion is the only one in the world that is based on a covenant between the individual and Yahveh, his God,” the content of the Qur’anic verbal exchange between God and His prophet revolves around defining the conditions of the covenant.⁴²⁵ The centrality of covenantal establishment is an essential component of the prayer type of dialogue exhibited in both the Jewish and Islamic prophetic traditions. Through the process of establishing covenantal boundaries, the reader receives an intimate portrayal of Qur’anic prophets from their verbal exchanges with God. When calling for mercy, or justice, from God, the general character of the prophet in the Qur’an becomes sharper and more developed. As a general pattern, the prophets of the Qur’an may look to demarcate the outline of the covenant, but they are less likely to take issue with God’s words

While there is no question that the verbal exchange between God and prophet is a dialogical type unto itself, this type of dialogue, like all categorized types of dialogue in the Qur’an, also provides a degree of leeway for the individual expression of the specific prophet. For some prophets, the Qur’anic tradition offers more of an opportunity to listen. Abraham in the Qur’an, for example, is characterized by a stronger focus on hearing, or silently receiving God’s words. In addition, many prophets are provided with a larger speaking role; Noah is perhaps the best example of this. In all cases of the speaking prophets in the Qur’an, there are only a few sequences of a prophet arguing, or taking issue, with God’s commands. Specifically,

⁴²⁴Ibid, p. 288.

⁴²⁵Frieze, ed., *Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin*, p. 48.

the Qur'an does not offer a scenario similar to when Abraham negotiates with God on behalf of residents of Sodom.⁴²⁶ The character development of the Abraham of the Qur'an from the Abraham of the Hebrew Bible, for example, illustrates the extent to which his personality becomes about accepting, rather than taking issue with, God's direction.

In regard to the third type of dialogue, which revolves around moral edification, there emerges a blurring in the lines of separation in dialogic types. While the categorization of the two most common types of dialogue (dialogue between a prophet and a nation and dialogue between a prophet and a God) is crucial to an understanding of Qur'anic prophets, a dialogue that has moral edification as its aim does not have to be a category onto itself. In his early study of the Qur'an, Geiger asserts that "Muhammad adopted from it [a biblical history] only such legends as were edifying in themselves and to which he could append pious reflections."⁴²⁷ While the assertion that Muhammad (as the author of the Qur'an) actively picked and chose certain biblical stories as they served his message may be dismissed due its overt polemical agenda, there remains value in understanding biblical characters and stories as serving a morally edifying role in the Qur'an.

In particular, the role of prophet (who, by default, could all be classified as "biblical") is to serve as a clarifying model in defining correct belief and practice. A number of scholars, like Roberto Tottoli, claim that the role of the Qur'anic prophet is to offer a warning of the punishment that awaits the unbeliever.⁴²⁸ Along these lines, the recitation of the experiences of past prophets serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of not accepting the prophetic message. In the Qur'an's characteristic way of using limited narrative space to deliver the most

⁴²⁶Genesis 18:16-33.

⁴²⁷Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1970), p. 119.

⁴²⁸Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*.

evocative message, these anecdotes are filled with dialogical instances that serve to play a didactic role by constructing an image of an enacted moral struggle in the minds of the text's audience. In light of the Qur'an careful use of dialogical imagery, it appears that all instances of prophetic dialogue have moral edification as their aim.

The fourth and fifth types of dialogue, a dialogue of consultation among speakers and a dialogue which takes place in the hereafter, respectively, presumably have their importance for understanding the overall lay of the Qur'anic land and the ancillary characters who inhabit it. For the most part, the Qur'anic prophets engage in neither type of dialogue. The one exception occurs in *surah 5* in a somewhat ambiguous place in the hereafter, or what the Qur'an refers to as "the day when Allah gathereth together the messengers."⁴²⁹ On this day, God questions Jesus about whether he told his followers to worship him and his mother.⁴³⁰ Aside from this example, these two dialogical forms are outside of the parameters of a comparative study of prophetic dialogue. So, while they are important, they need not be addressed here.

The sixth type of dialogue is the one sided dialogue and, from a psychological perspective, represents one of the more emotional rich moments in the depicted career of the Qur'anic prophet. In the instances of one sided dialogue, the prophet is consumed by a message that he feels compelled to share, but he has neither contemporaries nor God to hear his words. Without an audience to receive his message or a deity with whom he can commune, the prophet appears less prophet-like and more like a man lost in dialogue with himself. In these moments, the solitude of the prophetic experience becomes most evident.

The seventh, and last type of dialogue, occurs when there are several speakers, but few listeners. This dialogical form gives one the feeling of the chaos that is depicted in the given

⁴²⁹Q 5:109.

⁴³⁰Q 5:110-119.

scenario. One can imagine a noisy dialogue where every speaker is vying for attention by talking over one another.

All of these dialogues serve the purpose of declaring the personality speaking the attributed language. A survey of all the dialogical types applied to the Qur'an's prophets indicates how the text presents the prophets. Moreover, as the prophets serve as the medium for the divine message, their words speak for how the Qur'an presents itself. It is, therefore, edifying to consider the character of the speaking prophets and the occurrences of dialogue accredited to them.

With the exception of Noah and Solomon (who are discussed in depth below), the arrangement of the prophets, and the overview of their attributed dialogue, is ordered generally by the number of times that they speak in the Qur'an. The most frequently mentioned Qur'anic prophet, Moses, is followed by Abraham and Jesus. These prophets come at the beginning of the list because they are featured prominently across *surahs*. In the middle of the list are prophets who speak less frequently, like Joseph and Lot. At the end of the list are prophets with minimal instances of dialogue, such as Jonah, Ishmael, and Adam. In this list, there is the implicit claim of a hierarchy among the prophets. Although the Qur'an is clear that there is no distinction among the prophets, the discrepancy in the repetition of prophetic dialogue does tell the reader that certain prophetic stories are more prominent because they serve the interest of the text. So, while certain prophets may not be more important than others, certain prophetic stories are more important to Qur'anic claims.

Moses

Of the twenty-five named prophets and messengers in the Qur'an, Muhammad's name is only mentioned only four times. In this respect, it is Moses who receives the most attention; his

name is mentioned one hundred and thirty-seven times.⁴³¹ Among the prophets of the Qur'an, the repetition of Moses' experiences is the most overt example of the Qur'anic literary motif of being reminded (*dhikr*).⁴³²

The textual space allotted to Moses allows for a sufficient amount of narrative development. In his work, *Muhammad and the Quran*, Rafiq Zakaria writes: "Several lessons are highlighted in this narration of the life of Moses, notably (1) that falsehood can never triumph over truth; (2) that oppression cannot last for ever; (3) that the mightiest, too, are mortal; (4) that he whom God blesses is bound to succeed finally; and (5) that there is no power mightier than God."⁴³³ These are theological lessons that are not peculiar to the storyline of Moses in the Qur'an, as many of these same lessons appear in narrative accounts of Noah, Solomon, and Joseph. In a way, Moses is emblematic of the prophetic character of the Qur'an. Neuwirth explains that "Moses' experience in particular illustrates all the psychological contours involved in becoming a prophet: meeting the transcendent God, feeling insufficient strength in the face of the mission, experiencing fear and overcoming it, and ultimately finding strength to persevere in the face of humiliation."⁴³⁴ The prevalence of Moses' stories may be partially attributed to the manner in which he is representative of the prophetic experience.

The Qur'anic Moses, however, has a much more peculiar role of receiver of revelation and the distributor of the scriptural law. More than just a prophet, it is Moses' position as lawgiver that is central to his character in the Qur'an. In a general assertion, Geiger writes that

⁴³¹Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 8.

⁴³²This literary motif appears throughout the Qur'an and is discussed by Waldman and Gwynne (see above).

⁴³³Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran*, p. 348.

⁴³⁴Angelika Neuwirth "Narrative as Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an" in *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 277-305, esp. 301.

“the giving of Mosaic Law and the eventful life and noble personality of Moses” provides much for the Qur’anic narrative.⁴³⁵ The Qur’an does use the upstanding character of Moses and the Mosaic Law to present its claim on religious truth. Nevertheless, while the prophetic rectitude of Moses is beyond reproach, the covenant of the Qur’an, which is presented through Muhammad, completes the Law of Moses.⁴³⁶ Muhammad recommences the prophetic role of Moses, in particular, and “performs the important act of making the past present.”⁴³⁷ In this way, the vocational space once filled by Moses is filled with the character of the Prophet Muhammad.

With the first appearance of Moses’ name in the Qur’an the reader gets a more incisive description of his vocation and role, the Qur’an reads: “We gave unto Moses the Scripture (*kitāb*) and the criterion (*al-furqān*), that ye might be led aright.”⁴³⁸ Suliman Bashear looks at the term *al-furqān* by building on the notion from P. Crone and M. Cook in *Hagarism* that “the title ‘*faruq*’ constitutes an Islamic fossilization of a certain Jewish idea of messianism.”⁴³⁹ However, there are slight contextual variations in the meaning of the verb that can be seen in its various manifestations throughout the Qur’an. The different Qur’anic passages which use derivations of FRQ are as follows: Q 2:50: “we split the sea with you;” Q 17:106: “we revealed separately” or “we made distinct/clear;” Q 2:53; 3:4; 21:28: refers to scripture as a whole; Q 25: a specific chapter of scripture; Q 2:185; 8:29, 41: “the meanings of salvations, victory and proof.”⁴⁴⁰ To summarize the different uses of the term in these verses, FRQ can be understood as “to divide,”

⁴³⁵Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p. 119.

⁴³⁶In a manner that is similar to Jesus’ claim to fulfill the law (i.e., Matthew 5:17-20), the Qur’anic view is that Muhammad’s message completes, or perfects, the Law of Moses.

⁴³⁷Neuwirth “Narrative as Canonical Process,” p. 301.

⁴³⁸Qur’an 2:53.

⁴³⁹Suliman Bashear, “The Title ‘Faruq’ and Its Association with ‘Umar I,” *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990), pp. 47-8. While R. Bell and A. Jeffery’s contend that the Qur’anic use of “*furqān*” is related to the Syriac *perqana*, which expresses salvation, Bashear references al-Bīrūnī (b. 362/973), who explains the usage of “*faruqa rabba*” to mean “the great redeemer.” Furthermore, al-Bīrūnī explains the way in which a Nestorian Christian holy day was known as “*al-faruqa*” which means salvation (p. 48).

⁴⁴⁰Ibid, p. 49.

or “to make clear as a proof.” While this may seem simplistic, it is useful for the purpose of attempting to wrap your arms around such a broad subject.

This capacity to separate belief from disbelief is a feature of the prophet that is featured prominently in the accounts of Moses in the Qur'an. For instance, in the narrative of Moses there is the division between the people of Moses who are saved and the people of Pharaoh (the older generations) who are punished (Q 2:50). There is also a division between the guidance of the revealed scripture and the carelessness of the time in which it was revealed (Q 28). Moses, as a lawgiver, provides a division between those who follow the law and those who do not. To accentuate Moses' connection to this role, he is introduced to the Qur'anic reader by saying that along with scripture he was given *al-furqān*.⁴⁴¹

Similar to Moses, Muhammad has the capacity to divide, or distinguish, between belief and disbelief. Bashear cites an anonymous hadith which describes Muhammad as “a *farq* between people, i.e., he/believing or disbelieving in him affects the distinction (clarification) of believers from infidels.”⁴⁴² This connection between Moses and Muhammad continued in Islamic exegetical literature. In *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, Ibn Ishāq cites a tradition where, upon the death of the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Umar says: “By God, the apostle will return as Moses returned and will cut off the hands and feet of men who allege that the apostle is dead.”⁴⁴³ The tradition continues with Abu Bakr entering the room. Abu Bakr uncovers the face of the Prophet Muhammad and kisses him. Abu Bakr then says: “You are dearer than my father and mother. You have tasted the death which God had decreed: a second death will never overtake you.”⁴⁴⁴ This tradition seems to imply, at the very least, that there was some discussion by Muhammad's

⁴⁴¹Q 2:53.

⁴⁴²Ibid, p. 50.

⁴⁴³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, p. 682-3.

⁴⁴⁴Ibid, p. 683.

closest companions regarding a possible messianic role. Furthermore, this was a messianic role that was connected to Moses' depicted experience. As a consequence, Muhammad's similarity to Moses may exceed the position of simple recipient of scripture, lawgiver, and community leader.

Moses' depicted heroic role stretched beyond the Qur'an into a messianic tradition that is related to Muhammad. In his article, Bashear concludes that "this title (*fārūq*) must be seen as an Islamic fossilization of a basically Jewish apocalyptic idea of the awaited messiah."⁴⁴⁵ Much of this notion rests on the idea that the messiah makes the final distinction between believer and infidel. On the one hand, if this is the case, then the *fārūq* connection between Moses and Muhammad introduces a messianic dimension to Moses' strong prophetic similarity with Muhammad. On the other hand, if accepting *fārūq* as a reference to the awaited messiah is an exaggeration, then it at least should be understood as a role that depicts an individual capable of delineating of correct behavior from unlawful action.

Moses' Qur'anic personality is developed in such a way that he appears to be a point of emulation for Muhammad. However, there is a difference in the success of the dissemination of their prophetic messages. For Muhammad's role to be established, Moses' heroism must be illustrated by his symbolic death (as discussed in the previous chapter). In the Qur'an, the depiction of Moses' fall is necessary for Muhammad to supplant Moses' prophetic role as recipient of scripture, lawgiver, and community leader.

Different from the majority of Qur'anic prophets, Moses does not simply bring back a message or a reminder. Moses brings back an actual, physical vestige from his encounter and dialogue with God; the revelation of scripture.⁴⁴⁶ While, for other prophets, the sign of divine

⁴⁴⁵Bashear, "The Title 'Faruq' and Its Association with 'Umar I,'" p. 69.

⁴⁴⁶The Qur'anic David also receives scripture in the form of the Psalms (Q 4:163 and 17:55) and Jesus receives "clear proofs" (Q 2:87).

encounter is the message declaring the establishment of a new, or reestablished, covenant, for Muhammad (Q 3:3) and Moses (Q 2:53, 87). The teaching of the divine messenger revolves around instruction from this scripture.⁴⁴⁷ As Moses is the earlier recipient of scripture, he is a point of reference for the last recipient of scripture, Muhammad. As recipients of scripture, Muhammad and Moses are lawgivers, teaching the laws of scripture that separate right action from wrong.

With scripture as a source of instruction, Joseph Campbell describes Moses' role in representing the message of the father (God) through his position as a teacher.⁴⁴⁸ In particular, he is a teacher whose word is law. The role of Moses as teacher in rabbinic literature is quite apparent; his role is to teach the divine law. In Jewish rabbinic tradition, this vocation of Moses is illustrated with the common title of Moses: *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses our teacher).

Alongside Abraham and Noah, Moses is a major Qur'anic prophet because of the repetitive frequency of the stories about his prophetic career. Repetition texture inside of the text alerts the close reader of the Qur'an to the importance of an idea, or a character. In fact, it can be argued that Moses is the major prophet in the Qur'an because the recollections of his experiences outnumber the other two figures.

Yet, there is a difference between how the Qur'an tells the story of Moses and how it relates the stories of Abraham and Noah. Abraham's tale reaches its emotional climax with the dialogical exchange between father and son over the sacrifice in *surah 37* and the account of Noah is brought to a head with the debate between father and son in *surah 71* (both are discussed below). In contrast, the Qur'anic Moses does not have a specific *surah* which offers the culmination of his story.

⁴⁴⁷Q 2:151 and 6:2.

⁴⁴⁸Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p.347.

The central focus of the experiences of Moses is noticeably different from those of Noah and Abraham. The father-son relationship is a central feature in the overarching narrative of Abraham and Noah. Moses' Qur'anic experiences, however, do not revolve around the relationship between father and son nor do they focus on a familial relationship, in general. Nonetheless, conflict exhibited by dialogical exchange is a central feature with the depicted experiences of all three prophets. Noah has dialogical conflict with his son and his surrounding community. Abraham's main conflict is with his father. Moses' conflict is his showdown with Pharaoh. It appears that Moses is unlike Noah and Abraham because his primary prophetic struggle exists outside of his family. However, there is an element of a father-son relationship between Moses and Pharaoh because Moses lived in the house of Pharaoh.⁴⁴⁹ Although it does not carry the story of the Qur'anic Moses, it is part of Moses' experience in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an's primary storytelling method of brief reminders of past prophets is on display with Moses and Pharaoh and the repetition texture inside of the Qur'an illustrates the importance of this conflict. Across the Qur'an, there are seven instances when Moses has a dialogical exchange with Pharaoh.⁴⁵⁰ While there is repetition in the general feature of the retelling of the story, different versions of the dialogical conflict between Moses and Pharaoh serve different aspects of the Qur'anic presentation of Moses.

The first instance of this conflict in the Qur'an is one of the longest and it most clearly resembles what the folklorist Dundes refers to as a heroic "examination" or challenge (discussed above).⁴⁵¹ Moses, as hero, successfully passes this challenge and achieves his mission of getting Pharaoh's community to believe in his message (albeit, briefly). Neuwirth writes that Moses'

⁴⁴⁹Q 26:18-20.

⁴⁵⁰See Q 7:104-136; 10:75-90, ; 17:101-103; 20:47-66; 26:18-63; 28:36-38; and 40:24-30.

⁴⁵¹Q 7:104-136.

“actions are portrayed in a manner so autonomous and dramatic that he may be called a Qur’anic hero.”⁴⁵² The encounter between Pharaoh and Moses is the most dramatic instance of Moses’ Qur’anic narrative and its importance is highlighted through repetition. In particular, the challenge is reiterated in *surah* 10, but with an increased focus on the allure of wealth (a common Qur’anic theme that reappears in the narrative of Solomon).⁴⁵³ As a reminder to the reader, this confrontation is repeated three times in a more succinct fashion.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, in *surah* 26 there is the longest account of the back and forth between Pharaoh and Moses.⁴⁵⁵ This account includes added information about the back story between Pharaoh and Moses.

In true Qur’anic fashion, the text uses succinct attributed dialogue to inform the reader that Moses formerly lived in a house of idolatry and followed the practice of this house.⁴⁵⁶ The imagery of Moses living in Pharaoh’s house creates an element of a father-son dynamic between the opposing speakers. The mention of Moses living in the house of Pharaoh conveys a paternal role unto him. The statement that Moses left this house of idolatry is similar to Abraham breaking from the idolatrous ways of his father.⁴⁵⁷ This added information heightens the drama surrounding the dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses.

The strain in the relationship between Pharaoh and Moses is made more apparent when Pharaoh refers to the former habits of Moses. In the midst of a heated conversation, Pharaoh reminds Moses that he once followed the idolatry of the house of Pharaoh.⁴⁵⁸ Of course, Moses is not the only Qur’anic prophet to formerly live in an idolatrous home, but Abraham’s separation from the behavior is unmistakable. It appears that Moses’ breach from the idolatrous ways of his

⁴⁵²Angelika Neuwirth, “Narrative as Canonical Process.” p. 281.

⁴⁵³10:75-90.

⁴⁵⁴17:101-103; 20:47-66; 28:36-38; and 40:24-30.

⁴⁵⁵26:18-63

⁴⁵⁶Q 26:18-20.

⁴⁵⁷In reference to Q 21:51-70.

⁴⁵⁸Q 26:19.

former house is not as clean Abraham's break from his father. Unsurprisingly, this rare instance of an apparent slight in the character of a Qur'anic prophet is only made available to us by way of dialogue. As a consequence, it is through this attributed dialogue that we learn the degree of tension existing between Moses and his former guardian.

While the confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses is the central conflict in Moses' prophetic career, the receipt of scripture and the position of Jewish lawgiver remain important to the Qur'anic portrayal of Moses. More particularly, Moses gives the Israelites a covenantal law that is based on the revealed scripture. As a consequence, Moses' centrality inside of Judaism of revolves around his connection to scripture. With this in mind, the first instance of Moses' dialogue, or the beginning of the Qur'anic Moses story, is prefaced by the announcement that "We gave unto Moses the Scripture."⁴⁵⁹ The account of Moses begins with the revelation of scripture and the last instance of Moses' dialogue closes with Jesus calling out to the Israelites.⁴⁶⁰ By shifting from the central figure of Judaism (Moses) to the central figure of Christianity (Jesus), it could be argued that the transition into Jesus' experience indicates that the Moses tales (which stretch across *surahs*) are coming to end. If this is the case, then this overreaching agenda supports the idea that there is a logic to the arrangement of the prophetic stories across the Qur'an.

Moses' dialogical instances

Prophet and community

Q 2:54-61

⁴⁵⁹Q 2:53.

⁴⁶⁰Q 61:6.

After mention of the *furqān* in verse 53, Moses scolds his people for idolatry and they ask for clear proof (provided in verse 57)

Q 2:61

Brief dialogue between Moses and community about desiring food rather than obeying God.

Q 2:67-71

Moses instructs his people to sacrifice a cow.

One Sided Dialogue

Q 4:153

Community speaks to Moses asking for clear proof (covenant and miracle are mentioned in the following verse)

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 4:164

God spoke directly to Moses

Dialogue between prophet and community

Q 5:20-24

People (save for two members) are afraid to enter the land

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 5:25-26

Moses turns to God and God forbids entry into the land for forty years

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh; a heroic challenge)

Q 7:104-136

Moses succeeds at a heroic challenge and Pharaoh's community believes and makes a covenant, which they broke. So, they are drowned.

Q 7:137-142

Moses' community asks for idols like other communities, in response Moses asks Aaron to take control and leaves to go into solitude.

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 7:143-144

Moses asks to look at God and God provides him with scripture in the ensuing narrative (compare with Q 4:164)

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 7:149-150

Upon his return, Moses is angered at his community and at Aaron for building the idol

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 7:151-156

Moses turns to God and asks for mercy, which God provides

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 10:75-90

Reiteration of the sequence from Q 7:104-136, with an increased focus on the allure of wealth.

One sided dialogue

Q 14:6-8

Moses urges his community to give thanks to God

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 17:101-103

Condensed version of showdown between Moses and Pharaoh (from Q 7:104-136

And Q 10:75-90)

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (?)

Q 18:60-82

Unusual dialogue between Moses and his 'servant'

One sided dialogue to his kin

Q 20:10

Moses asks the significance of a fire

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 20:11-36

God sends Moses to Pharaoh and Moses asks for Aaron as his assistant

Q 20:41-46

With their reluctance, God sends Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 20:47-66

Moses and Aaron debate with Pharaoh, then Moses is brought into a challenge with Pharaoh's wizards

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 20:67-69

When Moses is afraid during the contest, he is comforted by God

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 20:70-73

Moses wins the contest and the wizards declare their belief

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 20:83-85

God informs Moses that his people are tried in his absence

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 20:86-97

Moses is angry and sad because his people broke the promise/covenant (see verses 80 and 86 for the same word in Arabic)

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 26:10-17

God calls on Moses to go to Pharaoh, but Moss is afraid asks for Aaron to accompany him

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 26:18-63

A long sequence where Pharaoh mentions raising Moses in his house and Moses says that he fled the house to be protected by God. Moses and Aaron defeat the wizards, but when they are forced to flee Moses does not loss faith in God's guidance.

One sided dialogue to his kin

Q 27:7

Moses spots a fire and says that he will bring a message or warmth from the fire

Dialogue between Prophet and God

Q 27:9-12

God has a message of forgiveness and turns Moses' rod into a moving object

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 28:15

Moses kills an enemy of his kin and calls that individual evil

Dialogue between Prophet and God (one sided)

Q 28:16-17

Moses calls out to his God for forgiveness

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 28:18-20

An unnamed stranger guides Moses to safety

Dialogue between Prophet and God (one sided)

Q 28:20-22

Moses calls out to God for guidance

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 28:23

Moses helps two women water their flock

Dialogue between Prophet and God (one sided)

Q 28:24

Moses ask God for good

Dialogue between Prophet and Community

Q 28:25-29

Moses meets the father of the women (one of whom he marries) and sees a fire in the distance

Dialogue between Prophet and God (no longer one sided)

Q 28:30-35

God turns Moses' rod into a moving object and grants his Aaron as his companion

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 28:36-38

Moses comes to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh disbelieves and wishes to build a large tower to disprove

Moses' claims

(Moses is given the scripture in verse 43 and in verse 76 Korah was of Moses' folk)

Dialogue between Prophet and Community (Pharaoh)

Q 40:24-30

Moses is sent to Haman, Korah, and Pharaoh and while they disbelieve a member of Pharaoh's house is a believer and defends Moses message (and warns against 'factions').

(In verses 36-46, Pharaoh wishes to build a tower to look upon the 'God of Moses,' similar to Noah's son on a mountain, but he 'who believed' argues against him)

Q 42:13-14

God speaks to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and explains that they were not divided on what was revealed to them

One sided dialogue to his kin

Q 61:5

Moses calls to his people as a messenger

(In the following verse, Jesus calls to the Children of Israel)

Close Analysis of a Prophetic Unit

The frequency and centrality of Moses' story in the Qur'an makes it rich with opportunity for close textual investigation. The following instance of dialogue is an example of a close study of the Qur'anic Moses. Although this occurrence of prophetic dialogue is only a section of the chapter, it can be seen as a standalone narrative unit that shows an opening-middle-closing texture. The tripartite division of this unit is distinguished by an opening section that has the call of the prophet, a middle section that presents a message for the prophet, and a closing section that depicts the mission, or the direction, of the prophet.

In the realm of intertextual analysis, this unit is similar to Moses' initial theophany in Exodus.⁴⁶¹ In both cases, Moses is brought to a divine encounter through a signal of fire. During the biblical and the Qur'anic verbal exchange, God identifies Himself, He charges Moses with a prophetic mission to confront Pharaoh, He changes Moses' staff into a snake, and it is decided that Aaron will accompany Moses. This intertextual connection marks this instance of Moses' dialogue as an account of ancient testimony because it is a moment where the Qur'anic audience can clearly categorize Moses as a revered character from a past tradition. The benefit of the usage of ancient testimony is that it adds rhetorical strength to the Qur'an because it shows ideological continuity and agreement with the revered older tradition.

Q 20:9-36
Opening:
وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى {9} إِذْ رَأَى نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا لَعَلِّي آتِيكُمْ مِنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجْدُ عَلَى النَّارِ هُدًى {10} فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ يَا مُوسَى {11}

⁴⁶¹Exodus 3:1-4:17.

	<p>إِنِّي أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَاخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طَوًى {12} وَأَنَا اخْتَرْتُكَ فَاسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَىٰ {13}</p>
Middle:	<p>إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي {14} إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ أَكَادُ أُخْفِيهَا لِتُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا تَسْعَىٰ {15} فَلَا يَصُدُّكَ عَنْهَا مَنْ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِهَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ فَتَرْدَىٰ {16} وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ {17} قَالَ هِيَ عَصَايَ أَتَوَكَّأُ عَلَيْهَا وَأَهُشُّ بِهَا عَلَىٰ غَنَمِي وَلِيَ فِيهَا مَآرِبُ أُخْرَىٰ {18} قَالَ أَلْقَهَا يَا مُوسَىٰ {19} فَأَلْقَاهَا فَإِذَا هِيَ حَبِيبَةٌ تُسْعَىٰ {20} قَالَ خُذْهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنْ سَنُعْبِدُهَا سَبِّرْتَهَا الْأُولَىٰ {21} وَاصْنُمْ يَدَاكَ إِلَىٰ جَنَاحَيْكَ تَخْرُجُ بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ آيَةٌ أُخْرَىٰ {22}</p>
Closing:	<p>لِنُرِيكَ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا الْكُبْرَىٰ {23} أَذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ {24} قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي {25} وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي {26} وَاخْلَعْ عُقُدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي {27} يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي {28} وَاجْعَلْ لِي وَزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي {29} هَارُونَ أَخِي {30} اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي {31} وَأَشْرِكْهُ فِي أَمْرِي {32} كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا {33} وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا {34} إِنَّكَ كُنْتَ بِنَا بَصِيرًا {35} قَالَ قَدْ أُوتِيتَ سُؤْلَكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ {36}</p>

Q 20:9-36

Opening:

9. Has the story of Moses come to you? 10. When he saw a fire, he then said to his family, "Stay. Indeed, I have noticed a fire. Perhaps I can bring you from there a torch, or find some guidance at the fire."

11. Then, when he came to it, he was called: "O Moses, 12. I am your Lord. Take off your shoes. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa.

13. And, I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed.

Middle:

14. Indeed, I am *Allah*. There is no God but Me. So serve Me, and establish the prayer for My remembrance. 15. Indeed, the Hour is coming. I almost hid it, so every soul will be

recompensed for what it strives. 16. So do not let one avert you from it who does not believe in it and follows his desires. For you will perish.

17. And what is that in your right hand, O Moses?" 18. He said: "It is my staff. I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves with it for my sheep, and for me are other uses with it."

19. He said: "Throw it, O Moses." 20. So he threw it. Behold, it was a snake moving swiftly. 21. He said: "Seize it and do not fear. We will return it to its former condition. 22. And draw your hand near to your side. It will come out white, without a blemish as another sign.

Closing:

23. That We may show you of Our greatest signs. 24. Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed."

25. He said, "My Lord, expand for me my breast. 26. And ease for me my task. 27. And untie the knot from my tongue. 28. So they can understand my speech. 29. And appoint for me an assistant from my family. 30. Aaron, my brother. 31. Increase through him my strength. 32. And make him share in my mission. 33. That we may glorify You much. 34. And remember You much. 35. Indeed, You are in us all seeing."

36. He said: "You are granted your request, O Moses.

The narrational texture of action and response between God and Moses illustrates the unfolding process of Moses receiving his prophetic mission and the claims that make up his message. The opening section begins with Moses telling his family that he notices a fire in the distance and he intends to bring back a torch or "find some guidance by the fire."⁴⁶² While looking to light his torch would be a reasonable prospect, Moses' interest in finding guidance is apparent foreshadowing of the divine mission that he is about to receive. It is also important to note the first thing Moses says to his family before leaving. He tells them: "Stay."⁴⁶³ While Moses is heartened to move toward this encounter with God, he must have his family stay behind. From this beginning stanza, we learn that the mission waiting for Moses is one where he must go out from his family. This represents the reappearing Qur'anic process where the

⁴⁶²Q 20:9.

⁴⁶³Q 20:9.

believer leaves family for faith. We also learn the lofty status of the entity calling out to Moses. Specifically, He introduces Himself as Moses' Lord and states that He has chosen Moses. He tells Moses that the requirement of this choosing is that Moses must listen.

The first statement from God to Moses in the opening unit takes the reader out of the inner texture of the Qur'an. In an almost exact recitation from the Exodus narrative, God's first command to Moses is to remove his footwear because he is in sacred space.⁴⁶⁴ While this recitation from an earlier textual tradition would help to authenticate the Qur'anic message, its recurrence here has an element of reconfiguration because there is a new designation of a geographic location. In Exodus, the sacred space is said to be "Horeb, the mountain of God."⁴⁶⁵ Whereas in the Qur'an, the space is designated as the "sacred valley of *Tuwā*."⁴⁶⁶ Regarding the exact location of the Qur'anic sacred space, Islamic tradition is divided. For instance Al-Farrā' (d. 207/823), places the valley in the Hijaz region of Arabia.⁴⁶⁷ Similarly, Brannon Wheeler's research finds that this location was outside Mecca at a site called *Dhū Tuwan*.⁴⁶⁸ However, other traditions place the location in al-Shām, or Syria/Palestine. Al-Bakrī (d. 487/ 1094) is among the theologians who place the valley in al-Shām and he goes farther to assert that it is at the base of "al-Tūr" (Mount Sinai).⁴⁶⁹ This location is supported by Devin Stewart who asserts that *tuwā* is a distorted version of *Tūr* for the reason of staying with a rhyme scheme.⁴⁷⁰ While

⁴⁶⁴In reference to Exodus 3:5.

⁴⁶⁵Exodus 3:1.

⁴⁶⁶Q 20:12.

⁴⁶⁷Al-Farrā' is referenced in Uri Rubin, "Moses and the Holy Valley Tuwan: On the biblical and midrashic background of a qur'anic scene," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (April 2014), pp. 73-81, esp. pp. 80-81.

⁴⁶⁸Wheeler is cited in Ibid, p. 81.

⁴⁶⁹Al-Bakrī is referenced in Ibid, p. 79.

⁴⁷⁰Devin J. Stewart is referenced in Ibid, p. 75. The research of Devin Stewart is supported by the Qur'anic accounts of Moses' encounter with God. On two occasions, Moses speaks with God in the valley of *Tuwā* (Q 20:12 and 79:16). On a third occasion, God calls to Moses "from the right slope of the Mount" (Q 19:52). Although these divine encounters occur in different chapters, they should be seen as part of the same overarching Mosaic narrative. A synoptic reading of the Qur'an, which weaves together seemingly disparate prophetic accounts, could suggest that these were the same location.

there is debate about the location of this encounter, the Qur'anic declaration of precise sacred space is significant detail of difference in the intertextual accounts of Moses.

The initial verse of the middle section offers a repetition with slight variance of Moses' caller self-identifying. Where before He calls Himself "Lord," He now states His proper name: *Allah*. Although the name is different from the one given in Exodus, the process is the same.⁴⁷¹ God provides a general introduction before revealing His true identity. After this introduction, *Allah* shares the tenets of His message: God is one, He wants to be served through remembrance, and there is a coming Day of Judgment. Moses is charged with sharing this message of monotheism, remembrance, and a warning of this Day of Judgment. These elements of Moses' message are shared with other Qur'anic prophets and serve as central Qur'anic claims.

The recitation of the process of God turning Moses' staff into a serpent is reconfigured in this instance of the dialogue between Moses and God. In the midst of God speaking, the biblical Moses interjects and asks what will happen if his audience rejects his message, to which God responds by showing him a series of miracles.⁴⁷² In contrast, the Qur'anic Moses does not interrupt God, a silence that speaks volumes about the character of Moses. He is faithfully obedient to God's call.

In fact, it is not until God finishes His call in the closing section that Moses speaks. The closing section begins with the final instructions to Moses: he must go before Pharaoh and share God's message. This is a command that Moses silently obeys, and his acquiescence confirms the unquestioning belief of Moses. Just as Moses' silence indicates an obedient aspect of his personality, Moses' response shows his insecurity. Uncertain about his ability to speak before an

⁴⁷¹In reference to Exodus 3:14.

⁴⁷²Exodus 4:1-9.

audience, Moses requests that his brother Aaron be appointed as his assistant. The section concludes with God granting this to Moses.

It is telling that Moses' lone statement to God is about self-doubt. God reveals His identity, His message, and His plan for Moses. Moses doubts none of it. Moses only questions his ability to share this message with his people. Through silence and selective dialogue, the Qur'an displays both the belief and humility of Moses.

While this unit of prophetic dialogue sheds light on the personality of Moses, it also places Moses in a larger context of prophet and hero. As mentioned above, Abraham Heschel explains that the prophetic experience has two components, the turning and the direction. The "turning" refers to the decision on the part of the prophet to accept the divine message. The "direction" is the prophetic expression, or sharing, of this message with his audience.⁴⁷³ In this instance of dialogue, the turning appears in the opening section when Moses rises and silently accepts God's call. The middle section consists of the major features of God's message. The closing section shifts when God provides Moses with direction. Moses is directed to share this message with Pharaoh, who has "transgressed."⁴⁷⁴ The tripartite divide between the turning, the message, and the direction configures the Qur'anic experience of Moses inside of the greater prophetic tradition.

In light of the centrality of Moses to the Qur'an, Moses' prophetic role can be expanded to a heroic one. As discussed above, Moses' Qur'anic experiences include many features common to the hero. This unit is emblematic of Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's retreat from, and return to, civilization.⁴⁷⁵ This part of the hero's adventure, or journey, has three

⁴⁷³See Heschel, *The Prophets: Part II*, p. 215.

⁴⁷⁴Q 20:24.

⁴⁷⁵Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p.35.

parts, all of which are illustrated in this instance of dialogue. Moses' decision to leave his family in the opening section is representative of a separation from civilization. Moses' encounter with God and the divine message that he receives from Him in the middle section signifies a penetration to a source of power. The closing section includes the command to confront Pharaoh and share the prophetic message, which signifies the life enhancing return to civilization. When Moses returns to the House of Pharaoh with evidence from his divine encounter, Moses does not just follow the prophetic model but the heroic one as well.

Abraham

After Moses, Abraham is the most mentioned prophet of the Qur'an. The many instances of Abraham's prophetic experiences across the Qur'an, offer three noticeable narrative details. There is (1) a claim about the monotheism practiced by Abraham, (2) a father-son topic, and (3) noticeable changes in the near sacrifice of Abraham's son. Abraham's frequency in the Qur'an indicates his importance and the centrality of these details to the development of the Qur'anic narrative. Zakaria writes that the "Qur'an regards Abraham as the spiritual progenitor of Muhammad; his story, therefore, occupies a special place in it and in the hearts of the faithful."⁴⁷⁶ To this end, the general function of the character of Abraham is to call for a return to a foundational form of monotheism. Beyond that, the religion of Abraham is presented to precede and supersede the covenant and message of Moses. In the dialogical developments between the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an we see that the argumentative Abraham of Genesis takes a turn toward the acquiescent Abraham of the Qur'an. Lastly, a different version of Abraham's most emotionally evocative experience is offered. Not only is the son intended for

⁴⁷⁶Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran*, p. 348.

sacrifice unnamed, but dialogical shifts alter the message offered by the story. Moreover, it is important to consider what is left out of the Qur'an, along with what is included within. The Abraham of the Qur'an serves to present the ways in which a religious text utilizes a recognizable figure to present central claims.

While the delivery of the Qur'an serves to fulfill the earlier covenant, which has since been distorted by the Jewish recipients of the message (e.g., Q 2:74-79), the Qur'anic message connects itself to an idealized version of Abraham's religion.⁴⁷⁷ From the Qur'anic perspective, Muhammad's completion of the Mosaic covenant requires a return to the initial Abrahamic message. In a large part, the strength of the appeal to Abraham is that he predates the figures responsible for defining central tenets of Judaism (Moses) and Christianity (Jesus). The Qur'an states that it follows the religious tradition of Abraham, rather than of Judaism and Christianity: "And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters."⁴⁷⁸ Additionally, Abraham is portrayed as being separate from the Jews and Christians: "Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man (*hanīf*) who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters."⁴⁷⁹ This pristine monotheistic religion/belief of Abraham is referred to as *hanīfā* in a number of instances throughout the Qur'an.⁴⁸⁰ By superseding Mosaic Law and tracing its religious message to the Abrahamic root

⁴⁷⁷Outside of the explicit context of Moses' message, one of the more explicit claims about the Jewish corruption of scripture may be found in Q 4:46: "Some of those who are Jews change words from their context and say: 'We hear and disobey; hear thou as one who heareth not' and 'Listen to us!' distorting with their tongues and slandering religion. If they had said: 'We hear and we obey: hear thou, and look at us' it had been better for them, and more upright. But Allah hath cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, save a few."

⁴⁷⁸Q 2:135.

⁴⁷⁹Q 3:67.

⁴⁸⁰Q 2:135; 3:67; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:120; and 16:123.

of the religious genealogical tree, the Islam of the Qur'an manages to be both before and beyond Judaism and Christianity.

The genealogical relationship between Abraham and Islamic sacred literature extended beyond the Qur'an and into the exegetical tradition. Similar to the way in which the Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogical account that connects Jesus to Abraham, Ibn Ishāq's 8th-century *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Biography of the Messenger of God) begins with Muhammad's ancestral heritage to Abraham. In a detailed ancestral account, Ibn Ishāq traces every step of Muhammad's heritage to Adam, and through Abraham, by way of Ishmael (as opposed to Jesus' connection to Abraham through Isaac).⁴⁸¹ In both cases, before the narrative of the central religious figure's story is told, there is the necessity of showing a familial connection to the foundational personage of Abraham.

The connection between Abraham and Muhammad is developed with their described physical resemblance in Ibn Ishāq's account of the Prophet Muhammad's ascent to the seven heavens (*mi'rāj*).⁴⁸² Aside from a brief mention of the event in Q 17:1, Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* provides, what J.R. Porter calls, the "earliest connected account of the ascension of Muhammad."⁴⁸³ This account is expanded upon later in works such as al-Tabari's *History* (completed in, roughly, 915 CE) and the Hadith collection *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* (compiled in the mid-ninth century CE). In Ibn Ishāq's record of this celestial ascension, Muhammad is received at each of these seven heavens, by each prophet, with a greeting of "brother and friend."⁴⁸⁴ It is not only the familial connection that Muhammad shares with these prophets. The narrative

⁴⁸¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 3.

⁴⁸²The word *mi'rāj* is Arabic for 'ladder,' but the term has come to refer, more broadly, to Muhammad's ascension to heaven. This development is linked to some traditions that describe Muhammad ascending to heaven via a ladder.

⁴⁸³J.R. Porter, "Muhammad's Journey to Heaven," *Numen*, Vol. 21, Fasc. 1 (Apr., 1974), pp. 64-80, esp. p. 64.

⁴⁸⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 186.

makes a point to indicate Muhammad's occupation of prophethood before he enters each heaven.⁴⁸⁵ As a result, Muhammad rises through the heavens as an initiate into the family and vocation of previous prophets.

However, the *mi'rāj* account in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* conveys Muhammad's prophetic connection to Abraham with a certain emphasis by Muhammad calling Abraham "my father,"⁴⁸⁶ and it is accentuated further by Abraham's strategic location in the hierarchal heavens. As the highest celestial plane, the seventh heaven is designated with special significance as God's residence. Therefore, Abraham's location in the seventh heaven exhibits his special divine proximity. Even among prophets, Abraham is closest to God. As mentioned above, Muhammad's ascent through the lower heavens, and implicitly through the lower prophets, to Abraham in the seventh heaven illustrates Muhammad's place in the highest heaven with the highest prophet. Additionally, when Muhammad encounters Abraham he describes the strong physical resemblance between himself and Abraham: "I have never seen a man more like myself than Abraham. This was my father Abraham."⁴⁸⁷ Contextualizing Abraham as Muhammad's 'father' indicates the importance the reports placed on stressing a genealogical connection from Abraham to Muhammad, and it is thematically relevant to Abraham's portrayal, in the qur'anic near sacrifice, where the father calls to his ambiguous progeny (described below). By characterizing Abraham as Muhammad's father, there is a collapse in the time separating Abraham from Muhammad; a father is afforded an immediacy that is not felt by a distant relative.

⁴⁸⁵Before Muhammad enters each of the seven heavens the resident prophet asks Gabriel whether Muhammad has commenced his message as a prophet (Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 186).

⁴⁸⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 186.

⁴⁸⁷Ibid, p. 186.

The emphatic argument for the physical similarity between Muhammad and Abraham is illustrated by the repetition of the first statement: “I have never seen a man more like myself than Abraham.”⁴⁸⁸ The implication is that the identity and vocation of Muhammad, as a divine messenger, mirrors his ‘symbolic’ father.⁴⁸⁹ Abraham, not the ancestor, but, the father, is drawn into the world and context of Muhammad’s message.

In the environment of the genealogically focused greater Arabia in the eighth and ninth centuries, this begs the question: what is the genealogical chain connecting Abraham to Muhammad? In regard to this, Ibn Ishāq begins the *Sīra* with the genealogy of Muhammad (in a manner similar to Jesus’ genealogy in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew). In a detailed ancestral account, Ibn Ishāq traces every step of Muhammad’s heritage to Adam, and through Abraham, by way of Ishmael.⁴⁹⁰

The case for the connection between Abraham and Muhammad extends into the provocative drama surrounding the near sacrifice of Abraham’s son. In his work on the reconstruction of Ibn Ishāq’s reports of past prophets, Gordon Newby finds that Ibn Ishāq connects the near sacrifice with Abraham visiting Ishmael, and building the Ka’aba, in the Islamic sacred space of Mecca. According to the reports attributed to Ibn Ishāq, we find that the winged horse, Buraq, brings Abraham to Mecca. Once in Mecca the Shechina (*Sakīnah*) (which is described as “a gentle wind [with]...a face which could talk”) commands Abraham where he and Ishmael shall build the Ka’bah.⁴⁹¹ An account of Abraham visiting Ishmael is attested in midrashic sources, but, the record of Abraham’s travelling to Mecca aboard the flying steed,

⁴⁸⁸Ibid, p. 183.

⁴⁸⁹The connection is not only symbolic. As mentioned in his genealogy, Muhammad is paternally related to Abraham.

⁴⁹⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 3.

⁴⁹¹Gordon Darnell Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 73-75.

Buraq, adds a peculiarly Islamic influence in connecting Abraham to Mecca.⁴⁹² In the context of Muhammad's ride on Buraq during the night journey and ascension to the seven heavens (the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj*, respectively), Abraham's choice of stead thematically connects Muhammad with his father, Abraham.

Moreover, the instance of the father calling to his ambiguous progeny is thematically significant for Abraham's portrayal in the Qur'anic near sacrifice. A comparison of preliminary dialogue in the sacrifice story of Genesis and the Qur'an indicates a structural shift of central characters from Abraham and God, to Abraham and his son. In Genesis, God calls to Abraham and Abraham's willingness to follow God's command is illustrated in the well-known: *hineni* ("here I am").⁴⁹³ Conversely, in the Qur'an, a similar dialogue occurs, but it is Abraham calling to his son. Additionally, in the Qur'an, it is the unnamed son providing an equivalent '*hineni*,' as the son says: "my father! Do that which thou art commanded...thou shalt find me of the steadfast."⁴⁹⁴ Thus, in consideration of the Qur'anic dialogue, we see that in the Qur'an it is the son, rather than Abraham, that rises to accept the sacrifice. Moreover, it could be that it is not necessary for the Qur'an to assign a response to Abraham because it is expected that, as a prophet, he will unquestionably accept God's command.

This aspect of the Abrahamic narrative brings up an important feature that is found in many of the Qur'an's prophetic stories. That is, one of the ways that the Qur'an differs from the bible is by not showing the prophets taking issue, or arguing with God's command. "Rather most Islamic versions of the story are, at root, about listening to God's voice. What God asks,

⁴⁹²Ginzberg, Louis, *The Legends of the Jews Volume I: Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America), pp. 266-9.

⁴⁹³Genesis 22:1. Abraham gives the same response to God in Genesis 22: 11.

⁴⁹⁴Qur'an 37:102.

his chosen people do.”⁴⁹⁵ Abraham is, perhaps, the best example of a Qur’anic prophet who refrains from dissenting from a divine command.

There is nothing in the Qur’an which is comparable to the negotiation between God and Abraham regarding the fate of the people of Sodom.⁴⁹⁶ The Qur’an, instead, situates Abraham as the obedient and quiet recipient of God’s word. According to Michael Lodahl, Qur’anic dialogue suppresses contention between Abraham and God.⁴⁹⁷ The Qur’anic prophet accepts the word of God. In this way, Abraham, along with the long list of prophets, is used as a point of emulation for the Qur’anic audience.

By having Abraham, rather than God, introduce the call to sacrifice, the Qur’an is attempting to “make the man from Ur the ur-man” of Islam.⁴⁹⁸ Of course, Abraham’s depiction in the Qur’an as a *hanīf* does add to the portrayal of Abraham as the “ur-man” of Islam.⁴⁹⁹ Specifically, the notion that Abraham’s religion predates Judaism and Christianity and is continued by the Qur’anic message strengthens this portrayal of Abraham. In what Mir calls “the living context of the Qur’an,” or the social environment in which the Qur’an was initially heard by Muhammad’s audience, the Ur-ancestor Abraham (taking over the introductory role in the dialogue) is calling to his unnamed son, and to all those unnamed sons of his seed, to rise to the call of their father.⁵⁰⁰ Mir describes the “living context of the Qur’an” as the diverse audience that initially heard the message of the Qur’an. However, the rhetorical strength of Abraham calling to his unnamed son would not be limited to the Qur’an’s original audience. Rather, it

⁴⁹⁵James Goodman, *Abraham and his Son: The story of a story* (Sandstone Press Ltd, 2015), p. 111.

⁴⁹⁶Gen. 18:16-33.

⁴⁹⁷Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), p. 31.

⁴⁹⁸Yvonne Sherwood, “Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the ‘Sacrifice’ of Abraham’s Beloved Son,” pp. 821-861, esp. p. 829.

⁴⁹⁹See Q 3:67.

⁵⁰⁰Mustansir Mir, “Some Aspects of Narration in the Qur’an,” *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sabbath (Leiden: Brill, 2009) pp. 93-106, esp. pp 104-5.

would continue to extend an invitation of interpretation for religious relevance to those who encountered the Qur'an in its textual format. Abraham's call to his son could step from its textual confines and into the social significance of the 'piety-minded' (to borrow Hodgson's term) who encountered the Qur'anic sacrifice story after its initial recitation.

Of course, for this call to achieve its full potential for rhetorical strength, the question, then, emerges who is this son and who are his ancestors? This question of genealogy was at the center of the discussion by early Islamic commentators in regard to the divided opinion as to which son was chosen. In his book, *Journey in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*, Reuven Firestone takes a tally of the Islamic commentators who provide a report on which son was the intended victim and finds that 130 traditions favor Isaac, while 133 favor Ishmael. To complicate this divided opinion, some commentators provide reports in support of both.⁵⁰¹ Within the Qur'an, though, the question of the intended son is left noticeably unanswered.

Along with being the authority for many reports that name Ishmael as the intended victim, Ibn Ishāq includes a tradition that relates the near sacrifice of Muhammad's father, Abd Allāh, by his father, 'Abd al-Muttalib. In this report, Abd Allāh is spared after a visit to a sorceress and one hundred camels are sacrificed in his stead.⁵⁰² The thematic significance of the sacrifice story of Muhammad's father is touched on in a report, on the authority of al-Sunabihi, which refers to Muhammad as being the "son of two intended sacrifices."⁵⁰³ In a folding of sacred time, having Muhammad's father survive a sacrifice (like his ancestral father Ishmael),

⁵⁰¹Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), p. 135.

⁵⁰²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 67-8.

⁵⁰³Al-Sunabihi is cited in Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, p. 148.

Ibn Ishāq’s audience, in the mid-eighth century and beyond, would have related this detail of Muhammad’s life to the experiences of the earlier prophet, his ancestor, Ishmael.

The early Islamic traditions focus on a father-son topic in the Abrahamic narrative grows from the same general theme of divide between family and faith in the Qur’an. Attention to the repetition and progressive textures inside Qur’anic *surahs* indicates the prevalence of the father-son topic in Abraham’s instances of dialogue. The prevalence of this subject exhibits the way in which genealogical lineage and inclusion take a central place in the Abrahamic narrative in the Qur’an.

This focus on family appears to contradict other sections of the Qur’an which suggest an emphasis on faith over family. For example, the Noah narrative in the Qur’an (discussed and developed below) has an overarching theme of relinquishing familial connections and accepting correct belief. However, it is not simply the case that the Qur’an represents family tradition negatively. Rather, the Qur’an redefines the pre-Islamic Arabian concern with familial genealogy. Familial importance in the Qur’an appears with the family of the prophets, the preferential treatment of the Abrahamic family, and Abraham’s relationship with his father and son.

As mentioned earlier, the prophets of the Qur’an all come from a shared lineage. Alongside the family of ‘Imran, the Qur’an states that God favors these prophets in the family of Abraham.⁵⁰⁴ This “seed” of this preferential lineage of prophets is referred to as *dhurriyya* and it “most frequently appears in conjunction with Abraham. The term, however, was first introduced in the story of Noah in Q. 37:77, which immediately precedes the story of Abraham.”⁵⁰⁵ The

⁵⁰⁴Q 3:33.

⁵⁰⁵Angelika Neuwirth, “From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur’anic Re-figurations of Pagan Arab Ideals based on Biblical Models” in *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur’an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 53-75, esp. pp. 62-3.

connection between the stories of Noah and Abraham is evident by the specific section of the Abraham narrative that is mentioned. The sacrifice story of Abraham (Q 37:83-112) illustrates the allegiance to God over family. There is a difference in the two stories because Noah's son is an unbeliever and he is punished. In contrast, Abraham's son is a believer and he is saved.

The lineage of Abraham is a privileged position in the salvation history of the Qur'an. Neuwirth notices that the word *dhurriyya* is "phonetically near, though not etymologically related, to the Hebrew word *zera'*, 'seed'; *zera'* is used in the Biblical patriarch narrative as a circumscription of 'progeny.' Thus, the 'seed of Abraham' in particular is the central concept in that divine promise, which in the Biblical text is the essential outcome of Abraham's sacrifice story [i.e., Gen. 22:17]."⁵⁰⁶ The Qur'an echoes the chosenness of Abraham's progeny, but it does so in a distinct manner.

The Qur'an places traditional Arab concern with tribal lineage to the periphery of importance. In regard to this, Neuwirth writes that "the patriarchal tradition of *nasab* [family genealogy] are, from the start, negatively connoted in the Qur'an."⁵⁰⁷ By removing a focus on traditional modes of family genealogy, there is space "for a new bond to emerge, one that provided historical depth to the community's new awareness that they were among God's elect, if not genealogically then certainly spiritually."⁵⁰⁸ While the prophets share the lineage of Abraham because of a familial connection, believers may not have the capacity to join this privileged family genetically but they are able to join spiritually.

Whether they may be in its initial audience, a listener of Qur'anic recitation, or a reader of the text, the recipient of the Qur'anic message is offered a choice of belief or disbelief, and,

⁵⁰⁶Ibid, p. 62.

⁵⁰⁷Ibid, p. 69.

⁵⁰⁸Ibid, p. 69.

therefore, inclusion or exclusion in this religious ancestry. The Qur’anic establishment of clear prophetic line (one that is sealed with Muhammad) supplants tribal history and biblical tradition by replacing “the preceding elects from among the Jews and Christians.” The introduction of this lineage offers a familial line “that all pious believers can claim as their spiritual ancestry.”⁵⁰⁹ Inclusion in this favored ancestry rests on whether an individual chooses to be a believing or unbelieving son.⁵¹⁰

The story of Muhammad’s celestial ascension indicates that inclusion in the line of the “father” Abraham is a favored position. While the genealogy at the opening of Ibn Ishāq’s biography of Muhammad shows the extracanonical importance placed on a lineage to Abraham the father, inside the Qur’an there are descriptions of Abraham’s role as a father, and as a son. The father-son topic appears across the majority of the *surahs* which include Abraham’s attributed dialogue. Generally speaking, Abraham’s parent-child relationship is depicted as positive because his son shows himself to be a believer in God. This is different from Noah’s relationship with his unbelieving son (discussed below). In contrast to Abraham’s relationship with his son, Abraham’s relationship with his father is fractured by a paternal tradition of idolatry. Abraham’s story is about moving away from the disbelieving parent and moving toward the believing child.

Mohammad Hussain Fadhlullah writes that one of the central elements of the Noah story is the “goodness of father versus the badness of son.”⁵¹¹ The inverse is the case with the

⁵⁰⁹Ibid, p. 71.

⁵¹⁰A more expansive notion of religious inclusion is not a feature limited to the relationship between Islam and the biblical tradition. Regarding the development of chosenness between Judaism and Christianity, the novelist Herman Wouk writes succinctly that “Jesus broadened this chosen communion to include all those who believed in his divinity and followed his teachings. For this reason an accepted Christian name for the church is ‘The New Israel’” (Wouk, *This is My God: The Jewish Way of Life*, p. 19).

⁵¹¹Fadhlullah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*, p. 204.

Abraham story. It is evident that a “bad,” or unbelieving father, is central to the Abrahamic narrative of the Qur’an because it is a recurring topic across the Qur’an. In the different occurrences of Abraham’s dialogue there are seven instances of Abraham speaking to his father against his practice of idolatry.⁵¹² While two of these dialogical occasions are brief recitations of the encounter between father and son, the remaining instances are developed verbal exchanges that reflect the charged emotions of a son breaking from the belief and traditions of his father. The more developed back and forth dialogue between father and son allows the Qur’anic audience to care more about the story because they have a better understanding of Abraham. In a way, this “is akin to a reader of a book or a novel who comes to empathize with the characters of the story.”⁵¹³ It is only when a reader cares for a character that they will care to understand the character.

It is evident by the dialogue in the Qur’an that Abraham’s break from his father did not come without an emotional strain. The simultaneous affection for his father and abhorrence for the ways of his father may be seen when Abraham rejects his father’s religion, but prays to God in the name of his father. One of the strongest examples of the emotionally charged back and forth between Abraham and his father has Abraham warning his father about becoming an ally of the devil and his father threatening Abraham with stoning.⁵¹⁴ However, Abraham does not leave his father in utter disregard. Rather, Abraham tells his father: “I shall ask forgiveness of my Lord for thee.”⁵¹⁵ To complicate the nature of this relationship between father and son, the Qur’an states: “The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a

⁵¹²Q 6:74-83, 19:41-50, 21:51-70, 26:69-104, 37:83-112, 43:26-28, and 60:4.

⁵¹³Fadhlullah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*, p. 217.

⁵¹⁴Q 19:44-46.

⁵¹⁵Q 19:47.

promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear unto him that he (his father) was an enemy to Allah he (Abraham) disowned him. Lo! Abraham was soft of heart, long-suffering.”⁵¹⁶ Abraham has enduring affection for his father, yet that fondness does not prevent him from distancing himself from his unbelieving family member.

Abraham’s distance from his unbelieving father is across the spectrum from the close proximity that Abraham has with his believing son. Fadhlullah notices that Ishmael was “shoulder to shoulder” in the divine mission alongside his father, Abraham.⁵¹⁷ The Qur’anic description of the raising and building of the Ka’aba is one of the best examples of the close proximity in the prophetic vocation between Abraham and Ishmael.⁵¹⁸

On the one hand, Abraham does not show preference for his son over his father because Abraham prays for both his father and son. In *surah* 14, Abraham calls out to God: “My Lord! Make safe this territory, and preserve me and my sons from serving idols.”⁵¹⁹ It is worth noting that Abraham prays for his offspring in the plural and that he leaves them unnamed. In a manner similar to the way in which the son intended for sacrifice is unnamed, there is a rhetorical significance of the Abraham in the Qur’an praying to God on behalf of all of his future generations. On the other hand, in relation to the prayer for the father, there is a sense of preference for the son because Abraham asks God to preserve his son, not forgive them. While the father is exonerated, the son is protected.

To show the full span of the difference in the nature of the relationship with Abraham’s father and son, refer to *surah* 37. In my view, this *surah* is the climax in the Abraham narrative. Inside of this *surah* there is a complete dialogical exchange between Abraham and his father.

⁵¹⁶Q 9:114.

⁵¹⁷Fadhlullah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*, p. 224.

⁵¹⁸Q 2:125-127.

⁵¹⁹Q 14:35.

This confrontational relationship gives way to the bond between Abraham and his son created by their belief in God. To illustrate the depth of this development of belief across generations, the Qur'an clearly has Abraham's son as the one who is willing to accept the call to sacrifice. With this, we see the intergenerational development of belief.

As the progenitor of this familial line, Abraham has a privileged station as well. To a certain degree, he is privileged over other prophets. The divine preference for the family of Abraham in the Qur'an develops in the biographical material of Muhammad to an increase of importance for an ancestral link to Abraham, in particular. The mentioned physical similarity and the genealogical connection between Muhammad and Abraham indicate that descent from this prophetic patriarch is a crucial element for the legitimization of the prophetic claim.

However, inclusion in the Abrahamic family is not as exclusive as it may seem. More specifically, membership in the fold of Abraham's family is not solely decided by paternal heritage. Abraham makes a call to the entire audience of the Qur'an to decide to become his believing son. As discussed above, in the emotional peak of the narrative inside of *surah 37*, Abraham requests an unnamed son to have complete obedience to God (exhibited by acceptance of the call of sacrifice). I argue that not naming Abraham's conversation partner serves the literary agenda of the text. In this noticeable break from the biblical story of the sacrifice, the identity of the son is open for interpretation and, as a consequence, there is the opportunity for the Qur'anic audience to place themselves in the story. Although the work of Firestone indicates that many Islamic exegetes were concerned with defining the genealogical line of Abraham, the nature of Qur'anic dialogue shows that Abraham's offspring are purposely ambiguous. When Abraham prays on behalf of unnamed sons in *surah 14* and when the Qur'an does not name the son of near sacrifice in *surah 37* it is because there is the creation of an opportunity for any

member of the Qur'anic audience to be initiated into Abraham's line.⁵²⁰ Abraham's wish for his unnamed sons is stated clearly in *surah 2* by his speech unto his progeny: "O my sons! Lo! Allah hath chosen for you the (true) religion; therefore die not save as men who have surrendered (unto Him)."⁵²¹ Ironically, the criterion for the inclusion in this line is an allegiance to faith over family. From the Qur'anic perspective, just as Abraham was a good son because he broke away from the idolatrous practice of his father, the good son of Abraham is one who makes a similar commitment to correct belief.

Dialogue between prophet and God and prophet and his sons

Q 2:124-132

God says that he will make Abraham a leader and Abraham asks about his sons. The dialogue continues into both Abraham and Ishmael talking to God from Mecca and closes with Abraham speaking onto his sons (including Jacob).

Dialogue between Abraham and his community and Abraham and God

Q 2:258-260

Abraham is in a debate with one of his community, then Abraham asks God to put his heart at ease

Dialogue between Abraham and his father (Azar) and his community

Q 6:74-83

⁵²⁰See Q 14:35 and Q 37:102.

⁵²¹Q 2:132.

Through dialogue the Qur'an narrates the development of Abraham's belief system from nature worship to recognition of God's power (**ends with a comment that this is the argument against Abraham**)

Dialogue between Abraham and his community (compare with Q 15:51-60)

Q 11:69-11:75

The story of Angels' visit and Sarah's laughter ends with a character depiction of Abraham

Dialogue between Abraham and God (prayer)

Q 14:35-14:41

Abraham asks God for perseverance and protection of him and his sons

Dialogue between Abraham and his community (compare with Q 11:69-11:75)

Q 15:51-60

The story of the visit of the angels

Dialogue between Abraham and his father

Q 19:41-50

After questioning him about idolatry, Abraham tells his father that he will pray for him

Dialogue between Abraham and his father and his folk

Q 21:51-70

Abraham attempts to dissuade his father and folk away from idolatry

One Sided Dialogue from God to Abraham

Q 22:26-29

God prohibits idolatry and prescribes the ritual of pilgrimage

Dialogue between Abraham and his father and his folk and Abraham and God

Q 26:69-104

After trying unsuccessfully to talk his father out of the practice of idolatry, Abraham asks God to forgive his father

Dialogue between Abraham and his folk

Q 29:16-17

Abraham calls his people to follow God

Dialogue between Abraham and God

Q 29:31-32

A brief exchange of Abraham asks for God to save Lot and his family

Dialogue between Abraham and his father progresses into dialogue between his son and God

Q 37:83-112

The dialogue begins with Abraham and his father and evolves into the Qur'anic account of the near sacrifice of Abraham's son. This is the climax of the Abraham story in the Qur'an because

it progresses from a relationship with the unbelieving father of Abraham to a successful test for believing son of Abraham. It stretches the full range of the father/son topic.

One Sided Dialogue between God and Abraham

Q 42:13

God commands Abraham (alongside Moses and Jesus) that there is no divide in their religion

Dialogue between Abraham and his father

Q 43:26-28

A brief one sided dialogue of Abraham renouncing his father's belief

Dialogue between Abraham and his guests

Q 51:25-37

Guests (possibly angels) visit Abraham and bring news of a son

Dialogue between Abraham and his father and his folk

Q 60:4

This is a brief recitation of Abraham's rejection of his father practice of idolatry. This dialogue is prefaced by the Qur'an stating that this rejection of unbelief may serve as a pattern.

Jesus

Jesus' character, in the New Testament, is depicted through a considerable amount of ascribed speech. Robbins notices that Jesus is particularly vocal in the Gospels of Luke and

John.⁵²² With this in mind, a comparison between the Jesus of the New Testament and the Jesus of the Qur'an does not indicate an elaboration of speech as is seen in with other prophets (e.g., a comparison between Noah in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an). However, the nature of Qur'anic dialogue attributed to Jesus focuses on contextualizing him within the prophetic typology. More than other prophets, the Qur'an puts an emphasis on the notion that Jesus is simply human. The perception that Jesus has a divine nature could threaten the Qur'anic theme of the uniformity of the prophetic character and his primary vocation of preaching monotheism. As such, Jesus' dialogical situations in the Qur'an revolve around proving that he is a human prophet that made no claims about possessing a divine nature.

In the Qur'an, there are five instances of attributed speech to Jesus.⁵²³ Yet, these instances are not uniform in their content. Like with most prophets, Jesus' dialogue in the Qur'an can be divided between the two most common of Mir's types of Qur'anic dialogue: dialogue between prophet and his people/nation and dialogue between prophet and God. Of the five accounts, there is one instance of a dialogue between Jesus and God (Q 5:110-119), and one occurrence of a dialogue between Jesus and his community shifting into a dialogue between God and Jesus (Q 3:53-58). The remaining instances of dialogue describe Jesus speaking unto his contemporary community. It is, however, a misrepresentation to categorize Jesus' audience as a cohesive entity. Rather, Jesus' audience can be divided into two "factions."⁵²⁴ In particular, Jesus' audience may be split between the rival and the receptive factions.

⁵²²Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, p. 52.

⁵²³Jesus' dialogue in the Qur'an can be found in the following verses: Q 3:49-58; Q 5:110-119; Q 19:30-33; Q 43:63-65; and Q 61:6.

⁵²⁴To use the term as it is defined in Boissevain, *Friends of Friends*, p. 192.

Two of the dialogical situations in the Qur'an depict Jesus speaking to his audience on the subject of his role as, only, a human prophet.⁵²⁵ To display this role, Jesus vocalizes his subservient relationship to God. In *surah Maryam* (Mary), Jesus tells his audience: "I am a slave of Allah. He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet."⁵²⁶ In a similar vocal expression of subservience to Allah, in *surat Az-Zukhruf* (The Gold Adornments), Jesus declares to his listeners: "Lo! Allah, He is my Lord and your Lord. So worship Him."⁵²⁷ In both *surahs*, Jesus' declaration received a mixed reaction from Jesus' audience, as the Qur'anic narrative states that "the factions (*ahzāb*) among them differed."⁵²⁸ Jesus' listeners are divided by a tension caused by a disagreement over acceptance of the prophet's message.

The factions among Jesus' assembled listeners are found in *surahs Al 'Imran* (Family of Imran) and *al Mā'idah* (The Repast). Both *surahs* depict Jesus conversing with a receptive faction of his audience that is obedient to the Qur'anic message of Jesus. This faction is referred to as "the disciples" (*hawāriyūn*).⁵²⁹ Their obedience to Jesus is evidenced by their stating that: "We believe in Allah, and bear thou witness that we have surrendered."⁵³⁰ Moreover, their vocalized acceptance of Jesus' message has a stronger rhetorical value in the social context of the revealed Qur'anic text when they say: "We believe. Bear witness that we have surrendered (unto Thee) 'we are Muslims.'"⁵³¹ The notion that the disciples who followed Jesus' message were Muslims would have possessed significant rhetorical value in the living context of the Qur'an. Specifically, the Qur'anic depiction of the prophetic typology is meant to illustrate a sense of continuity in the prophetic message. Without the Qur'anic narrative informing the

⁵²⁵19:30-33 and Q 43:63-65.

⁵²⁶Q 19:30.

⁵²⁷Q 43:64.

⁵²⁸Q 19:37 and 43:65.

⁵²⁹*Hawariun* is an Arabic term which is, generally, understood to refer to the disciples of Jesus, specifically.

⁵³⁰Q 3:52.

⁵³¹Q 5:111.

reader otherwise, the disciples attributed dialogue creates the understanding that following Jesus' message is synonymous with following Muhammad's message.

However, to exhibit how these disciples were Muslims it is necessary to clarify the message of Jesus. This clarification is exhibited in a dialogue between Jesus, as a prophet, and God. Specifically, in *Surat al Mā'idah* there is a dialogue, or interview, between God and Jesus.⁵³² Unlike the pattern found in many dialogical instances, where many instances of the prophet speaking with God is preceded by the prophet addressing the nation, this dialogue begins with God reminding Jesus what He taught him and the miraculous acts He allowed him to commit.⁵³³ The narration is driven by dialogue as the participants in the dialogue switch from Jesus and God to Jesus and his disciples. These disciples then, in a manner similar to Peter's vision in Acts chapter 10,⁵³⁴ ask Jesus if the Lord is "able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven?"⁵³⁵ In response to this, the narrative is developed through the shift back to Jesus and God being the principle actors in dialogue. A narrative developed solely in dialogue provides only the information within the verbal exchange. Thus, the unbroken flow of the dialogue indicates that the disciples witness the dialogue between Jesus and God. As such, they witness the verbal exchange that indicates that it is God, not Jesus, who has the ability to send down food from heaven.⁵³⁶

Moreover, the disciples (and the Qur'anic audience with them) witness a perception of God through the dialogue attributed to him. Unlike the reassuring God that consoles Noah's concerns, in this instance, God's character takes on an image of a direct inquisitor when He asks

⁵³²This dialogue occurs in Q 5:110-119.

⁵³³Q 5:110.

⁵³⁴Acts 10:9-16.

⁵³⁵Q 5:112.

⁵³⁶Q 5:114-115.

Jesus if he told man (*nās*) to take him and his mother as gods. In response, Jesus denies this accusation and asserts his subservience to God.⁵³⁷ The implication, by way of a dialogically driven narrative, that the disciples witnessed this dialogue provides Jesus' contemporary audience with the necessary evidence to support the Qur'anic claim of Jesus' role as a human prophet.

The characterization, through dialogue, of Jesus as a human prophet who readily admits his obedience to God would have had rhetorical significance in the living context of the Qur'an. In the first instance of his dialogue, Jesus turns from his unbelieving audience and receives solace from God.⁵³⁸ In light of how often a Qur'anic prophet (e.g., Noah) goes from conversation with a doubting people to a reassuring God, it is unsurprising that Jesus switches in dialogue from community to God. The second instance of Jesus' dialogue, however, is indicative of the central feature of Jesus' message: his role as a human prophet. As opposed to a response to complete disbelief in *surah* 3, when Jesus speaks in *surah* 5 he clarifies the notion of correct belief. Specifically, Jesus tells God that he did not tell his people to take him and his mother "for two gods."⁵³⁹ This specification of belief indicates a development in the speaking role of the prophet. Jesus clarifies the nature of correct belief, rather than simply calling for belief.

To stay with Mir's approach of contextualizing the *surahs* by Noldeke's division of revelation, we see that the two *surahs* that contain a dialogue between Jesus and God are categorized as 'Medinan *surahs*.'⁵⁴⁰ As such, they are reflective of a different living context than

⁵³⁷Q 5:115-117.

⁵³⁸Q 3:49-58.

⁵³⁹Q 5:116.

⁵⁴⁰*Surahs* 3 and 5 are categorized by Noldeke as Medinan *surahs* (*Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* revised and edited by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), pp. 110-111).

the majority of the prophetic stories because the majority of the prophetic stories appear in *surahs* revealed in the second and third Meccan periods. Locating these two dialogues in the context of revelation after the Muslim community had immigrated to Medina indicates that they were revealed in an environment where Muhammad was not being actively persecuted (at least not on a daily basis) by his adversarial kinfolk. Instead of defending the validity of the prophetic message to the disbelieving faction in Mecca, the early years of Medina are characterized by a refining of the Islamic message in relation to Judaism and Christianity.⁵⁴¹ This shift is evident in the nature of the second discourse between Jesus and God. Instead of Jesus appealing to God for counsel or support, as seen with Noah, the dialogue between Jesus and God focuses on specifying the manner in which Jesus is situated within the Qur'an's prophetic typology. This clarification of character is continued in the climax of the lengthiest account of the Jesus' narrative, when Jesus speaks from the cradle: "I am the slave of Allah [God]. He hath given me the scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet."⁵⁴² Therefore, the uniqueness of the dialogue between God and Jesus provides a window of, what Robbins calls, the "historical and cultural situation" of the text.⁵⁴³ Specifically, the development of Jesus' dialogue illustrates the development of an inchoate religious community delineating and claiming correct belief.

Dialogue between Jesus and his community before switching to a dialogue between God and Jesus

Q 3:49-58

After facing a disbelieving audience, Jesus is consoled by God

⁵⁴¹One of the best examples of the refining of the Islamic message in relation to Judaism and Christianity is the change in the direction of the *qiblah* (prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca, which occurred in, approximately, 624 CE (two after the Muslim immigration to Medina).

⁵⁴²Q 19:30

⁵⁴³From the definition of "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation" at the following URL:
http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/s_defns.cfm

Dialogue between God and Jesus

Q 5:109-119

The first verse is a question God asks of all prophets, before asking a question directly to Jesus)

Dialogue between Jesus and his community

Q 19:30-33

Through rapid maturation, Jesus speaks to his people from the cradle and declares his status as solely a prophet

Dialogue between Jesus and his people

Q 61:6-14

Jesus talking to the Children of Israel

Joseph

Among prophetic narratives in the Qur'an, the Joseph story is an anomaly in the sense that it does not follow the seemingly discordant style of jumping from one prophetic account to another. The story of Joseph in the Qur'an, rather, is the best example of a continuous narrative account of a prophetic character. The narrative, however, is largely driven by dialogue. It is not just through dialogue that the Qur'anic audience is introduced to individual personalities and recurring prophetic characteristics. Dialogue is the tool which the text utilizes to take the reader from the introductory passage to the climatic events and finally to the conclusion of the story. However, while the Joseph narrative is lengthier than other prophetic stories, the dialogue therein remains a concise style. Dialogue, then, progresses the story and maintains a quick tempo

throughout telling of Joseph incredible journey that stretches from his childhood in his father's house to reaching a height power in the land of Egypt.

While Joseph is the primary actor and speaker in this *surah*, there is also a list of characters that appear in both the Genesis and Qur'anic story of Joseph. They are as follows: Joseph's father (Jacob), his brothers, the 'king' of Egypt, 'travelers,' the 'Egyptian' and his wife, and Joseph's prison mates. The uninterrupted narrative in the Qur'an and the overlap in mentioned characters between sacred texts makes for an attractive opportunity for intertextual comparison.

By placing the two texts alongside one another the following similarities are located:

1. In both accounts Joseph is sold by his brothers for some silver⁵⁴⁴
2. Both narratives have Joseph relating a personal dream about astrological symbols⁵⁴⁵
3. Joseph deciphers the dreams of fellow prisoners, and the surviving prisoner forgets his promise⁵⁴⁶
4. After Joseph explains the ruler's dream, Joseph is placed as a key advisor to the ruler⁵⁴⁷
5. Joseph is described as physically attractive⁵⁴⁸

Perhaps, what is most curious about these similarities is that each of these events and claims are presented through dialogue. The process of selling Joseph is described through a conversation among brothers. Joseph speaks to his father about his dream. Joseph's experience with his

⁵⁴⁴Q 12:19-20 and Gen. 37:27-8.

⁵⁴⁵Q 12:4 and Gen. 37:9.

⁵⁴⁶Gen. 40 and Q 12:36-42.

⁵⁴⁷Gen. 41:9-40 and Q 12:46-56.

⁵⁴⁸Gen. 39-6 and Q 12:31.

fellow prisoners is told through dialogue. Joseph's rise to power is through verbal exchange. It is the exclamation from women of the city that instructs the reader of Joseph's physical attractiveness. With the Joseph story of *Surat Yusuf* (Joseph), the audience receives insight on the way in which the Qur'an makes use of dialogue as a preferred literary feature for telling a story.

There is also a central literary element of irony that is shared between Genesis and the Qur'an. Mir writes that the "essential irony of *Joseph* may be summed up in the statement that evil intended by human beings is turned into good by God."⁵⁴⁹ Although the Biblical story develops its characters further, provides sharper details, and offers greater variety in situational challenges, irony appears in both sacred texts. Irony is developed out of contrast by "establishing contrasts of various types that are resolved in accordance with what is finally recognized to be a divine plan."⁵⁵⁰ Through negation of human intention and activity (e.g., Potiphar's wife's attempt at seduction, Joseph's brother's devious plan, and the goal of the slave traders) there is the affirmation of the divine plan.

Lot

A relatively minor character in the Genesis narrative, Lot's place as a speaking character is relegated to only one chapter. While Lot has a peripheral role in the story of Abraham, Lot is the central protagonist of chapter 19 of Genesis. Lot speaks to the angels who previously visited Abraham, he also pleads with the members of his community who are attempting to 'know' the

⁵⁴⁹Mir, "Irony in the Qur'ān," p. 176.

⁵⁵⁰Ibid, p. 177.

angels, and there is a verbal exchange between Lot and God. Within half of a chapter, the biblical Lot's conversation partners include his immediate community, divine messengers, and God.

In a similar manner, the Qur'anic space allocated for Lot is relatively small. As is the case in the Hebrew Bible, Lot speaks with members of his community and divine messengers. Most importantly for his classification as prophet, Lot transitions from dialogue with his community to dialogue with God.

There are seven instances of dialogue attributed to Lot.⁵⁵¹ Among these, six dialogues begin with Lot addressing his people/community and two of these instances progress into Lot conversing with God.⁵⁵² The lone occurrence of dialogue outside of these is Lot communicating with angels/messengers sent from God.⁵⁵³ As a whole, Lot's dialogue, and therefore the presentation of his prophetic experience, is driven by the tension between the delivery of a monotheistic message and a naysaying audience.

Q 7:80-4 (Lot and his people)

Q 11:77-81 (Lot and his people)

Q 15: 61-71 (Lot and his people)

Q 26:160-169 (Lot and his people and Lot and God)

Q 27:54-6 (Lot and his people)

Q 29:28-30 (Lot and his people and Lot and God)

Q 29:33-35 (Lot and messengers)

⁵⁵¹Q 7:80-84; 11:77-81; 15:61-71; 26:160-169; 27:54-56; 29:28-30; and 29:33-35.

⁵⁵²Q 26:160-169 and 29:28-30.

⁵⁵³Q 29:33-35.

David

Although he is contextualized more as a statesmen and general than a prophet, the biblical David does have an intimate relationship with God. Most notably, in chapter 6 of 2 Samuel, David publically rejoices as he brings the Ark of the Covenant into the Jerusalem and God speaks unto him. For all of his prominence in Jewish tradition and in consideration that he (along with Moses and Jesus) is one of only three Qur'anic prophets to receive scripture, the Qur'anic David has a minimal amount of attributed dialogue.

Of the two dialogical occurrences attributed to David, one is a one sided conversation where God calls out to David and the other flows from a dialogue between prophet and community to a dialogue between prophet and God. *Surah* 34 contains a somewhat cryptic call from God to David states that he shall make armor and do right. In a lengthier account of dialogue later in the Qur'an, David adjudicates between litigants. At first glance, this story echoes the account of David's son, Solomon, judging between two women in regard to which is the mother of a baby brought before the king.⁵⁵⁴ More than likely, however, this is a recitation of the parable delivered by the prophet Nathan to David as a means to teach him a moral lesson about Bathsheba and her late husband, Uriah the Hittite.⁵⁵⁵ In both Hebrew Bible and Qur'an, David repents after the parable. In response, there is varying degrees of divine forgiveness between the two sacred texts. On one hand, in the Hebrew Bible, God removes David's sin, but still requires that his son is killed.⁵⁵⁶ On the other hand, in the Qur'an, David is completely forgiven and God designates David as "viceroys" (*khalīfa*) in earth.⁵⁵⁷ In this instance of

⁵⁵⁴1 Kings 3:16-28.

⁵⁵⁵2 Samuel 12.

⁵⁵⁶2 Samuel 12:13.

⁵⁵⁷Q 38:25-26.

intertextual analysis of David's dialogue, a more forgiving presentation of the divine emerges from the Qur'an.

Q 34:10-11 (God speaks to David)

Q 38:22-29

Jacob

The last of the three Hebrew patriarchs, Jacob has a minor role in the Qur'an and his speech is confined to him talking with his sons. Most notably, like Abraham before him Jacob enjoins his sons to follow the tradition of monotheism and when he asks them about their worship after his death, they respond: "We shall worship thy god, the god of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, One Allah, and unto Him we have surrendered."⁵⁵⁸ This dialogue with his sons could be seen as a condensed version of the lengthy account in Genesis 49, when Jacob (Israel) calls his sons to them "what is to befall you in days to come."⁵⁵⁹ The Qur'anic Jacob, then, is placed in the same patriarchal line of the Genesis narrative, with the noticeable addition of Ishmael.

Jacob also has a speaking role in the lengthy narrative of the Joseph saga. Joseph shares his dream with Jacob (Q 12:4-6); much to Jacob's chagrin, Joseph's brothers ask to take Joseph along with them (Q 12:11-13); Jacob is skeptical of the story of Joseph's disappearance (Q 12:17-18); Jacob is reluctant to let his sons take their brother (who we assume to be Benjamin) with them to Egypt and then sends them off with specific direction on how to enter the city; and Jacob's sons ask for forgiveness for their deceit and Jacob is reunited with Joseph (Q 12:63-67).

⁵⁵⁸Q 2:132-133.

⁵⁵⁹Gen. 49:1.

With this dialogue, Jacob's personality appears to be the same protective father of Genesis, who has a particular fondness for two of his sons.

Q 2:132-3 (Jacob speaks to his sons)

Q 12:4-6 (Jacob and Joseph)

Q 12:11-13 (Jacob and his sons)

Q 12:17-18 (Jacob and his sons)

Q 12:63-67 (Jacob and his sons)

Q 12:94-100 (Jacob and his sons)

Aaron

The Biblical narrative explains Aaron's relationship with Moses when God says to Moses: "your brother Aaron will be your prophet."⁵⁶⁰ Similarly, in the Qur'an, Aaron is appointed Moses' minister (*wazīr*).⁵⁶¹ While the title may change between texts, Aaron retains a similar job of helping Moses to carry the burden associated with receiving and disseminating a divine call. Moreover, as Aaron serves as the emissary for Moses in the Hebrew Bible and as Moses' advisor in the Qur'an, it is not surprising that all of Aaron's dialogical instances in the Qur'an are alongside Moses.

All of Aaron's Qur'anic verbal exchanges fall under the two most common types of dialogue; a dialogue between God and his prophet and a dialogue between a prophet and his community. On three occasions God speaks to Aaron, and Moses. On one occasion, God tells them to make a place of worship and a practice of prayers for their community.⁵⁶² On the second

⁵⁶⁰Ex. 7:1.

⁵⁶¹Q 25:35.

⁵⁶²Q 10:87.

occasion, there is a call to action for Aaron and Moses to go to those that have “rejected our signs.”⁵⁶³ God instructs Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh and when they are worried about Pharaoh’s insolence, God emboldens them with the reminder that they come with a sign from their Lord.⁵⁶⁴ While Aaron is mentioned alongside Moses on these instances when God provides instruction on His message, the confrontations between Pharaoh and God’s prophet are centered on Moses. Similarly, it is Moses who is usually described as addressing their community.

There is, however, the instance of the ‘Golden Calf’ in the Qur’an where Aaron addresses their shared community and demonstrates the virtuousness of the Qur’anic prophet. In the Hebrew Bible, Aaron is the architect for the creation of the calf. After he instructs the Israelites to bring him their gold, Aaron “took what they gave him and made it into a metal statue of a god. It looked like a calf. He shaped it with a tool.”⁵⁶⁵ In contrast, in the Qur’an it is As-Samiri who produces the calf and Aaron, in response, speaks out against the idolatrous behavior of his community: “O my people! Ye are but being seduced therewith, for lo! your Lord is the Beneficent, so follow me and obey my order.”⁵⁶⁶ This is a different personality from the Aaron of Exodus who not only makes the calf, but then, when questioned by Moses, lies to minimize his role in the idol making.⁵⁶⁷ Similar to how his attributed dialogue in the Hebrew Bible clearly implicates Aaron, the dialogue of Aaron in the Qur’an unmistakably exonerates him. This example of prophetic dialogue, and comparison of character developments between sacred texts, is indicative of the larger Qur’anic tendency to present prophets as the model for moral behavior.

⁵⁶³Q 25:35-36.

⁵⁶⁴Q 20:42-48.

⁵⁶⁵Ex. 32:2-4.

⁵⁶⁶Q 20:90.

⁵⁶⁷In reference to Ex. 32:21-24.

Q 10:87 (God speaks to Aaron and Moses)

Q 20:42-48 (Dialogue between God and Aaron and Moses)

Q 20:90-7 (Aaron speaks with his people and Moses)

Q 25:35-6 (God speaks to Aaron and Moses)

Q 10:89 (speech is implied in translation)

Q 28:34 (Aaron is described by Moses as “eloquent in speech”)

Q 37:119-21 (Blessing onto Moses and Aaron)

Zacharias

Zacharias’ primary dialogical instance is in the birth narrative of John Baptist. In a manner similar to that found in Luke 1, the account of John’s birth precedes that of Jesus. In this occurrence of dialogue Zacharias asks God: “My Lord! How can I have a son when my wife is barren and I have reached infirm old age?”⁵⁶⁸ In response, God declares: “It is easy for Me.”⁵⁶⁹ With a quick verbal back and forth, the reader understands the impediment to childbirth and the way in which God’s omnipotence hurdles any obstacle.

The seeming obstacle to childbearing and the subsequent successful birth of John the Baptist sets the stage, and prepares the reader’s expectations, for the story of Mary and her pregnancy. As was the case for Zacharias and his wife, it appears that Mary will not be able to give birth. In her case, she has not been touched by a man; Mary asks: “How can I have a son when no mortal hath touched me, neither have I been unchaste?”⁵⁷⁰ Nonetheless, in a similar fashion, the Qur’an emphasizes that through God all things become possible and Mary is able to

⁵⁶⁸Q 19:8.

⁵⁶⁹Q 19:9.

⁵⁷⁰Q 19:20.

give birth to Jesus. In fact, and with intentional coincidence, God responds again: “It is easy me.”⁵⁷¹

The Qur’an is strategic in its use of biblical material, so close adherence, and slight changes, to the biblical narrative both serve to push the Qur’anic agenda. Obedience to placing the two birth stories alongside one another in the Qur’an serves the overall agenda of portraying Jesus as a human prophet, without any divine nature. In an implicit argument, the Qur’an tells how Zacharias questioned God, who reminds him that it is no challenge for Him. As a consequence, Zacharias’ wife bears a child who is born through God, but who is not God. Mary also has a dialogue with God, during which God reminds her of His power and after which there is a birth of a child. The similarity indicates a Qur’anic attempt to show that Jesus (as Mary’s son) is as human as Zacharias’ son, John the Baptist. Zacharias’s, and Mary’s, dialogue with God adds textual evidence for the Qur’anic claim that Jesus is human, like all prophets that precede, and follow, him.

Q 19:11-12 (Zacharias speaks to his community to glorify God and speaks to his son, John, about scripture)

Q 21:89-90 (Zacharias prays to God for a child)

Job

In consideration of the way in which the Qur’an utilizes prophets and their divine confrontations, the biblical story of Job offers a dialogical scenario filled with the themes of punishment and reward that would fit within the parameters of Qur’anic prophets. The dialogue of the biblical Job is, however, much longer than the pattern of concise prophetic dialogue that

⁵⁷¹Q 19:21.

appears in the Qur'an. The succinct Qur'anic dialogue follows the Qur'an's design of a fast paced narrative that is economic in its presentation of central claims. As mentioned above, shorter dialogue increases the pace of the story, and it only allows for a minimal amount of information.

In accordance with the Qur'anic style of storytelling, Job's two instances of Qur'anic dialogue are brief. On both occurrences, Job cries to God about his affliction and asks for mercy.⁵⁷² The effect of Job's call for divine compassion in the face of his despair is emotionally evocative and is meant to remind the text's audience of the helplessness of man next to the power of God.

Q 21:83 (Job and God)

Q 38:41-42 (Job and God)

Jonah

The story of Jonah is told in brief by a quick overview of his experience of being swallowed by a "fish" (*hūt*). While inside this fish, Jonah recognized God and when he emerged from the fish Jonah was sent on a prophetic message.⁵⁷³ For the reader who is familiar with the story of Jonah in the Hebrew Bible, this account echoes the general details of the well-known tale. This recitation of the experiences of Jonah is, however, distinct from the majority of Qur'anic prophetic stories because the unfolding events are told in third person narration. Without any dialogue, it is different from the majority of Qur'anic prophetic tales, where it is the spoken word that drives the description of unfolding events.

⁵⁷²Q 21:83 and 38:41-43.

⁵⁷³Q 37:139-149.

In the lone instance of Jonah's speech, he is referred to indirectly as *Dhū-l-Nūn* ("the one of the fish or whale"). In an account of one sided dialogue between a prophet and God, Jonah calls out "from the darkness" to God and states that "there is no God but you."⁵⁷⁴ The image of Jonah calling out from the darkness evokes the story of him inside the whale mentioned elsewhere inside of the text of the Qur'an and outside the text in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, it is clear that this moment is emotionally charged by the image of a man in a place empty of light crying out to God. In a characteristically Qur'anic moment, the text makes economic use of narrative space to remind its audience of a powerful story and, through the recap of this prophet's experiences, offers a theological assertion that pulls on one's emotional instincts.

Q 21:87 (As Dhu al Nun, he calls to God)

Ishmael

From the perspective of many English translations of the Qur'an, it appears that Ishmael is least prominent among the prophets associated with dialogue. At first glance, it seems that Ishmael is simply a 'listening prophet.' An example of this notion is when the prophet, and Ishmael's father, Abraham, is alongside him.

And when We made the House (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and sanctuary, (saying):
Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And We
imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael, (saying): Purify My house for those who go

⁵⁷⁴Q 21:87.

around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship).⁵⁷⁵

At the site of the Ka'aba, Abraham and Ishmael received the responsibility of sanctification, or refining, a house of sanctuary. A connection with construction of this house is the central endeavor of Ishmael's position in the Qur'an.

In relation to the construction of the Ka'aba it is possible to understand an extension of Ishmael's role. At the time of the building, Abraham calls out to God in prayer: "And when Abraham prayed: My Lord! Make this a region of security and bestow upon its people fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day."⁵⁷⁶ It is clear that it is solely Abraham speaking because of the first person singular possessive pronoun when he calls out to God as 'My Lord' (*rabbi*). In the same episode of relating to God near the Ka'aba, there is a second call to God that includes Ishmael.

While Ishmael's role in dialogue is not offered by many Qur'anic translations, alongside Abraham, Ishmael calls out to God in prayer in the succeeding verse after Abraham's prayer. At the time "when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House" there is a call to God.⁵⁷⁷ Specifically, the caller says "Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower."⁵⁷⁸ In a parenthetical comment, Pickthall's translation of the Qur'an has Abraham praying to God. It is apparent that Abraham is not alone in addressing God because the possessive pronoun attached to the title lord is in the first person plural (*rabbana*).

⁵⁷⁵Q 2:125.

⁵⁷⁶Q 2:126.

⁵⁷⁷Q 2:127.

⁵⁷⁸Q 2:127.

Similar to how Ishmael receives the message from God alongside Abraham, Ishmael also prays to God alongside his father, Abraham.

All of Ishmael's dialogical instances are associated with the building Ka'aba. In addition, Ishmael's receipt and dispatch of dialogue are shared with his father. The connection to the central sacred space of the Ka'aba and to the central prophetic character of Abraham situates Ishmael in a place of increased prominence over Abraham's other son, Isaac. Without the character dimensions caused by attributed dialogue, Isaac of the Qur'an becomes flat. Ishmael is presented as a personality connected to central a figure and space.

The Qur'an does not provide a straightforward description of which son is preferred by Abraham. In this way there is not the clear designation of the favored son being chosen for sacrifice, like one may find in the Hebrew Bible:

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'⁵⁷⁹

This explicit declaration of Isaac being chosen for sacrifice, and subsequently as the genealogical lineage through which Abraham's covenant with God will be maintained, is noticeably different than the Qur'anic description of the near sacrifice.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁹Genesis 22:1-2.

⁵⁸⁰Genesis 21:11-13.

And when (his son) was old enough to walk with him, (Abraham) said: O my dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice thee. So look, what thinkest thou? He said: O my father! Do that which thou art commanded. Allah willing, thou shalt find me of the steadfast.⁵⁸¹

The ambiguity about the son intended for sacrifice continues into the exegetical writing of early Islamic theologians. As mentioned above, Firestone's work indicates that Islamic commentators are divided in their reports as to which son was chosen for sacrifice.⁵⁸² Out of this divided opinion, Ishmael has emerged in popular Islamic belief as the subject of the near sacrifice. The general acceptance, in Islamic tradition, of Ishmael as the intended victim is evidenced by Firestone's assertion that Ishmael's *laqab* (honorific nickname) is *madhbuh*, a word which refers to "the thing that is cut...or a sacrificial animal slaughtered in accordance with religious practice".⁵⁸³ While *madhbuh* means "slaughtered" or "slaughterable," here it means "the one who was about to be slaughtered." At the center of this recognition of Ishmael as the proposed sacrifice is his connection to Abraham and their shared role in building the Ka'ba and establishing the liturgical rituals in Mecca.

The dividing point on which son was chosen rests on whether the near sacrifice occurred in Mecca or Syria. For example, on one hand, the version of the sacrificial act attributed to the traditionsist al-Suddi (d. 127 AH/744 CE) places the act in Syria and names Isaac as the proposed victim. On the other hand, in the version from the authority of Ibn Ishāq (d. 767 CE), the planned sacrifice occurred in Mecca with Ishmael as the planned victim.⁵⁸⁴ The reports that

⁵⁸¹Qur'an 37:112.

⁵⁸²Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, p. 135.

⁵⁸³Ibid, p. 105.

⁵⁸⁴Ibid, p. 119.

place the near sacrifice at Mecca weave this account of sacrifice into a description of Abraham and Ishmael's role in building the Ka'ba and establishing the pilgrimage ritual in Mecca.

In Gordon Newby's reconstruction of Ibn Ishāq's biographies of the pre-Islamic prophets, there is an assembly of a collection of reports regarding Ishmael and Abraham's religiously precedent-setting activities in Mecca.⁵⁸⁵ In the process of building the Ka'bah, Abraham and Ishmael discover the first foundation of their ancestor Adam and a divinely planted foundational stone. Upon completion of the Ka'bah, Abraham and Ishmael perform seven circumambulations of the Ka'bah. Finally, at God's command Abraham announces the advent of the pilgrimage to Mecca.⁵⁸⁶ Placing the near sacrifice of Ishmael alongside Abraham and Ishmael's involvement in building the Ka'bah in the sacred space of Mecca points to the underlying assertion in the reports that, as Newby states, "there is a new dispensation and a new line of inheritance."⁵⁸⁷ The line of prophetic inheritance, which began with Adam, passes from Abraham through Ishmael to Muhammad. By illustrating how the prophetic lineage is associated with Mecca, the city emerges as the sacred location for an "Ur-Islam." Moreover, by connecting the near sacrifice to Mecca, the event becomes linked to this Ur-Islam.

Genealogical connection to Ishmael develops into a central component of the developing identity of the Islamic community. Early Islamic theologians linked a common Arab ancestral tie to Ishmael as an attempt to resolve what Ignaz Goldziher called the "north-south antagonism," a conflict which had "its roots in the rivalry between Qurayshites and Ansar."⁵⁸⁸ According to Goldziher, here was no north/south tribal antagonism in pre-Islamic time. This

⁵⁸⁵Gordon Darnell Newby, The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 73-6.

⁵⁸⁶Ibid, p. 75.

⁵⁸⁷Ibid, p. 66.

⁵⁸⁸Ignaz Goldziher and S.M. Stern, ed., Muslim Studies (New Brunswick, Aldine Transaction, 2008), p. 92.

This rivalry rests on tribal divisions that separate Muhammad's tribe in Mecca, the Quraysh, from the helpers (*ansar*) who accepted Muhammad's message after the emigration (*hijra*) to Yathrib, or Medina. Goldziher points toward the second half of the first Islamic century as the "beginning of antagonism between northern and southern Arabs."⁵⁸⁹ Simultaneous to the rise of this north-south antagonism was the initial activity of Arab genealogists who were responsible for continuing the traditions that documented the tribal lineages. However, when the severity of the rivalry reached such a degree that "even Jews or foreign *mawālīs* (clients) were preferable to southern Arabs," Goldziher claims that theologians referenced sayings from Muhammad which declare a shared origin for, both, southern and northern Arabs.⁵⁹⁰ As a way to reach a compromise between the claims of supremacy made by the northern and southern Arabs, theologians cited traditions that support a common ancestry from Ishmael.

An example of the development of this shared ancestral origin can be observed in Muhammad's genealogy in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah*. The edition of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* that is available to us through the recension of Ibn Hishām (d. 218AH/833 CE).⁵⁹¹ While the inability to approach Ibn Ishāq's original text creates obvious problems, Ibn Hishām's notes on Ibn Ishāq's biography elucidates how theological concerns developed between the mid-eighth and ninth centuries. An example of this is Ibn Ishāq's description of the distant relationship between Qahtan (the progenitor of the southern Arabs of the Yaman) and Ishmael.⁵⁹² Yet, Ibn Hishām's notes on Ibn Ishāq's genealogy of Muhammad assert that "some of the people of the Yaman claim that Qahtan was a son of Ismā'īl (Ishmael) and so according to them Ismā'īl is the father of

⁵⁸⁹Ibid, p. 95.

⁵⁹⁰Ibid, p. 96.

⁵⁹¹It should be noted that there also exists copious extracts of Ibn Ishāq's reports in the histories of al-Tabari (d. 923 CE).

⁵⁹²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 3.

all Arabs.”⁵⁹³ Ibn Hishām’s insertion indicates the malleability of Ishmael’s genealogy to address the shifting needs of a dynamic political situation in the first Islamic centuries.

Specifically, it is evidence of Goldziher’s assertion that genealogists were looking to construct a shared lineage for southern and northern Arabs as a means to reduce the strife between the two groups.

In a similar fashion, a contemporary of Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845), includes a biography of Ishmael in his biographical collection, *Kitab al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* (The Great Book of Biographies), which illustrates Ishmael’s foundational position in Arab lineage.⁵⁹⁴ In particular, Ibn Sa’d includes a report that names Ishmael as the first person to speak Arabic.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, Ibn Sa’d relates a tradition where the Prophet Muhammad states, like Ibn Hishām, the claim that Ishmael is the father of all Arabs.⁵⁹⁶ Like Ibn Hishām’s additions to Ibn Ishaq’s genealogy, Ibn Sa’d’s reports of placing Ishmael as the first to speak Arabic and the father of all Arabs seems to indicate the sentiment among Islamic commentators that Ishmael could be viewed as the ancestor par excellence for all Arabs.

Perhaps more importantly, the theologians’ appeal to a common Ishmaelite heritage as a means to reduce territorial tension indicates the potential rhetorical strength that early Islamic theologians placed on tracing traditions to Ishmael. While the theological significance of Ishmael in post-Qur’anic material and popular Islamic tradition is acknowledged, Ishmael’s place inside of the Qur’anic narrative appears more ambiguous. He is not named as the son intended

⁵⁹³Ibid, p. 691.

⁵⁹⁴It should be noted that Ibn Sa’d does not provide a biographical entry for Isaac. Presumably, this indicates a certain disregard for the genealogical significance of Abraham’s other son.

⁵⁹⁵Ibn Sa’d, *Kitab al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā* Vol. 1, p. 50.

⁵⁹⁶Ibid, p. 51.

for sacrifice and, at first glance, it does not appear that he has special significance to Islamic tradition. It is, however, clear that Ishmael is favored in mainstream Islamic opinion.

All of the Abrahamic traditions, in fact, develop an accepted view regarding the near sacrifice. In her article, “Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the ‘Sacrifice’ of Abraham’s Beloved Son,” Yvonne Sherwood writes: “for Jews the son *is* Isaac, for Muslims he *is* Ishmael, and for Christians he *is* both Isaac and the Isaac-Christ.”⁵⁹⁷ Before tradition develops around the idea that the planned son was Ishmael, the presentation of Ishmael’s personality through dialogue, in contrast to Isaac’s muted character, indicates that the Qur’an pushes Ishmael to the foreground, while Isaac remains in the silent background, of the religious narrative.

Q 2:125 (Ishmael is commanded, alongside Abraham, to purify the house at Mecca)

Q 2:127 (Ishmael and Abraham pray together after making the house at Mecca)

Adam

The first of a long line of biblical prophets, Adam has three moments of dialogue that repetitively tell the experience of expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Aside from the opening of the first moment of Adam talking (when God instructs Adam to tell animals their names), Adam’s dialogue in the Qur’an has him repeatedly being tempted by Satan and then repenting to God.⁵⁹⁸ The repeated exchange between Adam and Satan point to Heschel’s assertion (quoted above) that a prophet is “one who is called (by God), one who has a vocation (from God), as well as one who is subject to the influence of a demon or false god, and who retains the condition

⁵⁹⁷Sherwood, “Binding-Unbinding,” p. 831.

⁵⁹⁸Q 2:33-37; 7:19-25; and 20:117-123.

imposed upon him by that call or influence.”⁵⁹⁹ Adam is not the only prophet who communes with both God and a demon, or false god. The rich extracanonical narrative surrounding the, so called, Satanic Verses indicate that Muhammad, like Adam, struggles with receipt of messages from two distinct supernatural entities.⁶⁰⁰ With Adam, the repetitive texture inside the Qur’an and the slight thematic embellishments between the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an, indicate a central theme revolving around the dangers of disbelief and God’s subsequent mercy.

Q 2:33-37 (God tells Adam to name the animals)

Q 7:19-25 (After God and Satan speak to him, Adam converses with God)

Q 20:117-123 (God and the devil speak to Adam, but God offers guidance)

CHAPTER FOUR

Noah and Dialogue

This chapter investigates the instances of dialogue attributed to Noah in the Qur’an by contextualizing the Noah of the Qur’an against the biblical representation of Noah. The nature of the Qur’anic narrative presumes the reader’s familiarity with the biblical stories, and the comparison of the biblical Noah with the Qur’anic Noah allows the development of Noah’s Qur’anic personality to become sharper and more evident.

⁵⁹⁹Ibid, p. 185.

⁶⁰⁰The story is mentioned briefly in the Qur’an (Q 53:19-20) and developed in the works of many *mufasssirūn*, such as al-Tabarī who mentions Ibn Ishāq as a source for the story. Mainstream discussion of this subject, however, did not develop until the publicized serious of events that followed the publication of Salman Rushdie’s 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*. The late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran’s decision to issue a *fatwa* calling for the death of Rushdie was the most well-known of these events.

General Overview of Noah in the Qur'an **Noah in Qur'anic Surahs**

- Q 3:33 (family of Imran)
- Q 6:84 (Guiding prophets (including Solomon))
- Q 7:59-64 (**Dialogical instance** between Noah and the chieftains of his people)
- Q 10:71-3 (One sided **dialogical instance** to his people)
- Q 11:25-48 (**Dialogical instance** between Noah and his people and his son)
- Q 17:3, 17 (Seed of Noah and generations destroyed after Noah)
- Q 19:58 (Ship of Noah)
- Q 21:76-7 (Prayer of Noah)
- Q 23:23-30 (**Dialogical instance** between Noah and the chieftains of his people)
- Q 26:105-21 (**Dialogical instance** between and his people (brother) ('plain warner,' 115))
- Q 29:14 (Lived for 950 years)
- Q 33:7 (covenant from the prophets)
- Q 37:75-83 (Prayer of Noah)
- Q 54:9-15 (**Dialogical instance** where Noah is called a 'madman' and he calls to his Lord)
- Q 71:1-28 (**Dialogical instance** between Noah and his people and God)

People of Noah

- Q 9:70 (compared with the people of other prophets)
- Q 11:89 (Referenced in the Shu'eyb narrative)
- Q 14:9 (Referenced in the Moses narrative)
- Q 22:42 (In direct reference to Muhammad, it seems)
- Q 26:105 (In a Noah narrative)
- Q 38:12 (Mentioned alongside the people of other prophets)
- Q 40:5, 31 (Mentioned to contemporary audience and alongside the people of other prophets)
- Q 50:12 (Mentioned alongside the people of Ar-Rass (?) and the people of other prophets)
- Q 51:46 (Polemic against them)
- Q 53:52 (Polemic against them)
- Q 54:9 (Dialogical instance within the Noah narrative, calling him a 'madman')
- Q 71:1-28 (Significant Noah narrative)

Prayer of Noah

- Q 54:10 (Call to God after being called a 'madman')

Religion of Noah

- Q 42:13 (The same religion that is ordained for other prophets)

Son of Noah

Q 11:42-6 (Dialogical instance between Noah and his son)

Revelation sent to Noah

Q 4:163 (Inspired Noah and the prophets after him)

Q 57:26 (Prophethood and scripture for Noah and Abraham's seed)

Wife of Noah

Q 66:10 (The wife of Noah and the wife of Lot as a sign for the disbelievers)

Noah in Genesis and the Qur'an

A comparison of the Noah narrative in the book of Genesis and the Qur'an illustrates two central themes. The first theme is punishment for the unbelievers. The second theme is mercy for the believers. Noah's prophetic story serves as a rhetorical tool that strengthens the Qur'anic claim for a new covenant and serves to illustrate the dangers associated with not accepting this new covenant. In addition to these themes, the central topic of prophecy appears alongside the topics of covenant and Day of Judgment. Although it may be suggested that punishment is a central element of the story, a close reading of Noah in the Qur'an indicates that other issues are at play. In particular, the Flood story is not just about who is drowned, but who is saved. In this way, the Qur'anic reader learns about punishment and salvation. In addition, the experiences of Noah (across *surahs*) illustrate the steady escalation of mistreatment and disbelief that a prophet will endure from his surrounding community.

Although the Qur'anic narrative is spread over many *surahs*, there is a consistent framework to the narrative account of Noah shared by the Bible and the Qur'an. The story of Noah in Genesis begins with God warning Noah of the flood. Noah and his sons build an ark. The flood ensues. After the flood, God renews his covenant with man (Gen. 6:8-9:17). Throughout the biblical narrative, the arrangement remains consistent. Even the seemingly tangential story of Noah's drunkenness maintains this order. It is apparent that this incident

occurred after the flood because Noah is called "the man of the earth" (Gen. 9:20). Noah is upon the earth, not flood waters, when he debases himself.

Noah's narrative in the Qur'an proceeds in a similar order. This is best illustrated in *surah* 11 verses 25-48. Noah warns the people. They do not listen. Furthermore, they mock him as he builds his ark. The same people then perish in the flood.

Additionally, the Qur'an and the Bible record the same amount of years to the life of Noah. The Biblical account says Noah is 950 years old (Gen. 9:29). The Qur'an suggests the same (Q 29:14).

A functional significance of the story of Noah in Genesis is to confirm God's covenant with man. Before Noah, mankind fell out of favor with God and became the subject of God's punishment. There are two examples of this punishment: Adam and Eve sin and are punished (Gen. 3:16-19), and Cain is punished for killing Abel (Gen. 4:11). After these punishments, and directly before the Noah narrative, Genesis describes how mankind's wickedness has only increased.⁶⁰¹ In short, the flood serves as a punishment for the increased iniquities of man.

However, the punishment is fleeting; after the flood God reestablishes his covenant between Him and man. God restores the covenant with man through one of Hebrew Bible's preferred literary tools, repetition. Twice in Genesis chapter nine, God tells Noah to "be fruitful and multiply."⁶⁰² To the reader, this is reminiscent of God's first commandment to Adam, the call to be "fruitful and multiply."⁶⁰³ By echoing this initial commandment, God is reestablishing the initial contract between man and God.

⁶⁰¹Gen. 6:5.

⁶⁰²Gen. 9:1 and 7-9.

⁶⁰³Gen. 1:28.

The Qur'an continues with the theme of punishment, and, perhaps, more than the other prophetic accounts, the theme of punishment serves to unite the various instances of Noah in the Qur'an. Along these lines, Muhammad Abdel Haleem recites that many in Islamic scholarship hold the "view of Noah as being 'the first prophet of punishment.'"⁶⁰⁴ According to Haleem, this aspect of the Noah narrative is not the sum of the Qur'an's presentation of this prophet. Haleem contends that "although the theme of divine punishment is, undeniably, an element that occurs in nearly all the Noah accounts in the Qur'an – almost all of which explicitly mention the flood – such a reductionist reading of Noah's Qur'anic persona misrepresents his presence in the Text."⁶⁰⁵ To support his claim that punishment is not central to the Qur'anic presentation of Noah, Haleem compares the elaborate description of the drowning victims in Genesis 7:20 with the brief description of events in Q 71:25, "they drowned."⁶⁰⁶ According to Haleem, these two words summarize the description of punishment in the Qur'anic flood story. While aware of the argument that the terseness of Qur'anic language, or the "eloquence of the brevity," provides the text with an increased amount of rhetorical power, Haleem contends that the prolonged description of the events leading up to the flood make those happenings the focus of the Noah story.⁶⁰⁷ Given the narrative space allotted to Noah's endurance in the face of challenges from his audience, Haleem asserts that Noah's "exemplary steadfastness" is the most prominent feature associated with Noah in the Qur'an.⁶⁰⁸

With that in mind, the punishment component of the story should not be discounted. In fact, the element of punishment is broader than the manner in which Haleem describes it.

⁶⁰⁴ Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," p. 38.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 38.

⁶⁰⁶ See also Q 10:73, 21:76-77, and 26:119-120.

⁶⁰⁷ Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," p. 51.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 55.

Although Haleem claims that “whenever punishment is mentioned, it is with the two words ‘they drowned,’” the Qur’an explains, in greater depth, what happens to the disbelievers in Noah’s community: “Because of their sins they were drowned, then made to enter a Fire. And they found they had no helpers in place of Allah.”⁶⁰⁹ Therefore, in the Qur’an, the consequence for disbelieving is not just drowning, but also isolation from God and admission into the Qur’anic depiction of a fiery underworld; disbelief in Noah’s message had eschatological consequences.

Nonetheless, Noah’s confrontations with community and conversations with God have as much to do with salvation as they do with punishment. For example, in *surah* 71, which, as described below, may be seen as the climax of the Noah narrative, Noah asks God: “My Lord! Leave not one of the disbelievers in the land.”⁶¹⁰ However, more than that, Noah also asks God: “My Lord! Forgive me and my parents and him who entereth my house believing, and believing men and believing women, and increase not the wrong-doers in aught save ruin.”⁶¹¹ With that request for forgiveness the *surah* ends and Noah’s story is not recited again in the Qur’an. These two requests alongside one another indicate that it is as important who is drowning in the water as who is saved on the ark.

Noah receives salvation because he was unwavering in his adherence to God. Therefore, to achieve a similar degree of forgiveness the reader is implicitly encouraged to emulate, what Haleem refers to as, “exemplary steadfastness of Noah.”⁶¹² More than simply a tale of punishment and salvation, the flood story of the Noah of the Qur’an provides its audience an example of how to escape punishment and attain salvation.

⁶⁰⁹Q 71:25.

⁶¹⁰Q 71:26.

⁶¹¹Q 71:28.

⁶¹²Haleem, “The Qur’anic Employment of the Story of Noah,” p. 55.

Noah's resoluteness to God's message speaks to a more general utility of the story. As a whole, "the function of prophetic stories is to reinforce the prophethood of Muhammad, and reassure both him and the believers in their long struggle against persecution, which, in the end, they will win."⁶¹³ With the specific examples from Noah's experiences, "the stories are not biographies, nor even histories of prophethood, but accounts of specific moments or events which are meant to give lessons."⁶¹⁴ With Noah, there is the opportunity for a lesson about the importance of unwavering commitment to the prophetic message.

The application of this lesson would allow the Qur'anic Noah narrative to serve as a rhetorical tool for educating the living context of the Qur'an in the issues central to the text. Early Islamic biographies of Muhammad describe the reluctance of some in his audience to accept the new message and the overt resistance of his own family against Muhammad's claim of sharing a new covenant. From this view of the Qur'an's initial social environment, Qur'anic exhortations that implore Muhammad to not let "their [the unbelievers] speech grieve thee" (Q 10:65) may be contextualized as sources of reassurance for Muhammad.

Noah's story, therefore, also serves as a powerful reinforcement for Muhammad's message. Like the depiction of Muhammad in the earliest biographies, many people denied Noah's message.⁶¹⁵ However, with unrelenting belief and significant endurance, Noah followed God's word, and the unbelievers were punished. Like the punishment stories of other Qur'anic prophets, Noah's story illustrates potential dangers for those who do not follow Muhammad's claim on a new covenant.

⁶¹³Ibid, p. 55.

⁶¹⁴Ibid, p. 55.

⁶¹⁵See Q 10:73.

A consideration of the theme of punishment, however, offers one of the most striking differences between the story of Noah in the Qur'an and in Genesis. God's declaration after the flood exhibits this difference. In Genesis God says "Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life."⁶¹⁶ The biblical narrative is making it apparent that this punishment will not be repeated. In contrast, after the flood story the Qur'an says: "(There will be other) nations whom We shall give enjoyment a long while and then a painful doom from Us will overtake them."⁶¹⁷ The implication is that there is a looming Day of Judgment for nations after the flood.

In his article, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," Gordon Newby explains that the Qur'anic type of urgent, or apocalyptic, time is "a sense of time collapsed from its two ends onto the present middle, transforming the act of choosing the right path into the immediate necessity."⁶¹⁸ The way in which the Qur'an reminds its listeners of the story of Noah creates a sense that a similar type of catastrophe, punishment, or divine judgment may be repeated at any moment. The way in which the past folds into the present creates, what Newby calls, an "unsettling tension" between traditional histories and the Qur'an's "dehistoricized" version of the past.⁶¹⁹ Like the majority of the Qur'an's recitations of past experiences, the history of the prophets is not something that is buried and forgotten in the past. As Newby explains, "the *exempla* of the past are freed from their historical shackles to become guides for choosing a moral path in the present."⁶²⁰ Recitations of prophetic stories suggest the image of a fork in the moral road, offering two

⁶¹⁶Genesis 9:15.

⁶¹⁷Q 11:48.

⁶¹⁸Newby, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," p. 333.

⁶¹⁹Ibid, p. 336.

⁶²⁰Ibid, p. 336.

possible directions for the contemporary question of belief. As a result, old stories are infused with new theological life.

A consequence of this possibility for a pending penalty is that the Qur'an's initial audience could conceive itself as one such nation. Moreover, the rhetorical strength of this narrative detail extends to subsequent recipients of the Qur'anic message who could, in turn, imagine themselves as the potential victims of punishment. The Noah narrative serves as a clear illustration of what happens to unbelievers, and a warning of what will happen again (instead of what will never happen again).

The speaking character who calls for the punishment is also a noticeable difference between Genesis and the Qur'an. Specifically, the prophet Noah becomes a more active participant in the process of punishment, salvation, and communal dispute through the attribution of dialogue. On the one hand, in the Hebrew Bible, the call for punishment is made by God and Noah quietly obeys the command.⁶²¹ On the other hand, in the Qur'an, Noah calls for God to destroy his "people" because they refuse to abide by his message.⁶²² In a comparison of the sacred texts, there is a modification in the power dynamic between man and God when Noah calls for the flood, and its destructive powers. In addition, the capacity to call for destruction increases the strength of the prophet. While working with an underlying Qur'anic claim about God's omnipotence, it appears that Noah instigates this idea.

It is, however, worth noting when the Noah of the Qur'an appeals to God to issue this punishment. As described in greater length below, there are seven occurrences of Noah speaking in the Qur'an and, across these different sections of the Qur'an, Noah endures significant abuse from his audience. It is only in the last instance of Noah's dialogue that we, as readers of the

⁶²¹Genesis 6:13-22.

⁶²²Q 71:21-28.

Qur'an, see him reach his boiling point and call for a judgment of punishment to fall on those who ignored his prophetic calling. By the way in which the Qur'an lays out the sequence of affairs, there emerges an image of Noah patiently enduring a string of insults before imploring God to intervene.

The layout of the Noah narrative across the Qur'an indicates an overall narrative agenda. Gordon Newby writes that "the Qur'an weaves a temporal structure under the surface subject-narratives, adding color to their message and binding together disparate subjects."⁶²³ The Qur'anic stories of Noah present one of the better examples of the way in which there is a substructure connecting the numerous prophetic narratives. In this way, the prophetic stories are like a binding agent that pull the text together. With Noah enduring insult and disbelief before calling for God to punish the disbelievers and to forgive the believers, there is a metanarrative that transcends individual *surahs*.⁶²⁴ In line with Mir's work in *Coherence in the Qur'an* and Abdul-Raof's work on repetition, this narrative connection across *surahs* indicates a linear interrelationship that weaves the text together, progresses the narrative texture of Noah's story, and adds to the argument regarding the cohesion of the Qur'an.⁶²⁵

This assertion has implications on the organization of Qur'anic *surahs*. By sidestepping early Islamic exegetical literary concerns of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), and western scholarship's development on the idea through the work of, and reaction to, Nöldeke, the narrative development through dialogue offers insights on the Qur'an's layout. The sequence of Noah's speaking instances shows a clear development of Noah's reaction to his community's disloyalty and Noah's relationship with God. Rather than an arbitrary organization of the

⁶²³Newby, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," p. 334.

⁶²⁴Q 71:26-28.

⁶²⁵See Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* and Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Stylistics*, pp. 195-204.

Qur'anic chapters, this character development points to a narrative arc, across different chapters, of Noah enduring derision before reaching a climax of building emotions in his final speaking act.

Similar to the Qur'anic elaboration on the duration of punishment, and a call for the need of punishment, the Qur'an expands the extent of punishment to include members of Noah's family. In Genesis, one of Noah's sons, Ham, commits a sin; he gazes upon his father's drunkenness.⁶²⁶ For this iniquity God punishes Ham's offspring to a legacy of enslavement.⁶²⁷ Similarly, in the Qur'an Noah's son commits a sin. He does not heed the advice of his father, and does not believe the message from God. For this, he is punished with death along with the other unbelievers.⁶²⁸ Although Noah warns his son otherwise, Noah's son thinks he will be safe from the flood on a mountain. He is not safe and drowns on the mountain.⁶²⁹ While the biblical Noah's son Ham does commit a grave sin of disrespecting his father, he does believe God's warning of the flood, he does follow his father into the ark, and he does live.⁶³⁰ With only a slight narrative variance, Noah's sinful son, who is a believer in God in Genesis, changes to an unbeliever in the Qur'an.

The shift in the belief of Noah's son raises question regarding the identity of the unbelieving son is discussed in the Islamic traditions. In his article, "The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Qur'an and *Tafsīr*," Gordon Newby writes that Islamic exegetical literature gives two possible names for the drowned son: Canaan and Yām.⁶³¹ Along with

⁶²⁶Genesis 9:22.

⁶²⁷Genesis 9:25-27.

⁶²⁸Q 11:42.

⁶²⁹Q 11:43.

⁶³⁰Genesis 7:13.

⁶³¹Gordon Newby, "The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Qur'an and *Tafsīr*," *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies*, William M. Brinner (ed.), (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 19-32, esp. p. 22.

showing how early Islamic traditionalists consulted Jewish material as a way to achieve a broader view of Biblical prophets, Newby's study illustrates the way in which the Qur'anic developments of the tension between family and faith catch the attention of early Islamic exegetes. The clash of allegiance between family and faith is central to a thorough understanding of the Qur'an's narrative of Noah.

The Qur'an's accounts of disbelief within Noah's family extend to his wife. The Hebrew Bible states that Noah's wife followed him into the ark.⁶³² While the Qur'an does not explicitly state that she does not follow Noah into the ark, his wife is compared to Lot's wife.⁶³³ In both cases a wife betrays God's righteous believer. Since the wives betrayed their husbands, and God, they are punished. Although, the Qur'anic reader is left to speculate whether or not she follows Noah into the ark, it is evident that, like his son, Noah's wife is an unbeliever.

The point of the confrontation between Noah and his son is like the separation between Noah and his wife. The significance of the divide between Noah and these family members is to showcase the theme of faith superseding allegiance to family. Faith over family is relevant to the familial challenges to Muhammad's message during his life and in the 'living context' of the Qur'an.⁶³⁴ Neuwirth supports the notion that this conflict between faith and familial adherence extends beyond the text. The struggle between Noah and his family mirrors a conflict between believers and unbelievers among the initial Qur'anic audience, which created an unsettling of established familial structures.⁶³⁵ In addition, this theme stretches across sacred texts to the Synoptic Gospels and the Abrahamic narrative in Genesis.

⁶³²Genesis 7:13.

⁶³³Q 66:10.

⁶³⁴As described in Ibn Ishāq's biography of Muhammad, among other traditions, there were many dissenters to Muhammad's testimony of prophecy from among his greater family. In particular, Muhammad faced many challenges from his kin network during the Meccan period of his prophetic career.

⁶³⁵Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 629-630.

In examples from outside of the Qur'an, there are a number of occasions in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Mark 10:29-30, Matthew 19:29, and Luke 18:29-30) where Jesus mentions a reward for those who leave the house of their family "for the sake of the kingdom of God."⁶³⁶ In a more direct statement, this point is developed further in Matthew 10:34-38 when Jesus recites Micah 7:6 to proclaim that he has "come to turn 'sons against their fathers.'"⁶³⁷ This is a point that Jesus echoes in Luke 12:49-53, by declaring that he has come to separate members of a family from one another. With these examples, there is the consistent message that adherence to the divine takes priority over familial allegiance.

In the Qur'an, the separation of a portion of Noah's family from his belief in God's message illustrates a recurring theological assertion. In regard to the Qur'anic depiction of a severed relationship between parent and child, Walid Saleh writes that the "Quran shows profound distrust of the filial language of both Judaism and Christianity... As a matter of fact, the Quran as well as the Ummah it envisioned were based on the negation of father-son ties, and on the breaking of kinship ties."⁶³⁸ The Qur'an offers a particular focus on breaking the father-son connection for the sake of correct belief. However, this severance of familial ties is neither limited to the father-son relationship (as seen by the depiction of Noah's wife, mentioned above) nor is it limited to the Qur'an (as seen by the Abraham narrative in the Qur'an, mentioned below). The idea is that even when one's nearest relatives' disbelieve, the true believer should hold true to his faith. The fidelity of faith over family is rewarded; the unbelief is punished.

This notion may be likened to the biblical introduction to the eponym of the Abrahamic religious traditions. In Genesis, Abram is directed to leave the house of his father and go into the

⁶³⁶Luke 18:29.

⁶³⁷Matthew 10:35.

⁶³⁸Walid Saleh is quoted in Angelika Neuwirth "From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant," pp. 53-54.

unknown with only the promise of God's direction for a guide.⁶³⁹ A similar idea of Abraham breaking away from his father is found in the Qur'an: "Abraham said unto his father and his folk: Lo! I am innocent of what ye worship."⁶⁴⁰ In this sense, correct action for the believer may mean choosing the message and direction of God over the unbelief and misdirection of one's family. The shared Qur'anic and biblical assertion is clear: belief in God takes precedence over familial allegiance.

Along with the punishment of the unbelievers, the Qur'an continues the Bible's implication of Noah's re-establishment of Adam's covenant with God. As expressed above, in Genesis God makes a covenant with Noah and decrees unto him the same order that was given to Adam: "Be fruitful and multiply."⁶⁴¹ With this command, God places a similar decree upon Noah and Adam. A comparable notion appears in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an the believers in the Garden of Eden are made as "regents in the earth."⁶⁴² In a striking comparison, God makes Noah and those who believed in His message "viceroys (in the earth)."⁶⁴³ God re-establishes his covenant with Noah by assigning him the position once designated to Adam: God's earthly ruler.

This comparison of the Adam and Noah stories of the Qur'an does not just speak to a reestablishment of the covenant; it also shows how well the Qur'an illustrates the divide between belief and unbelief. In a manner similar to the Genesis story, the Qur'anic narrative has God likening belief on the ark to belief in the garden. In this way, the divide between believer and unbeliever is delivered in a rhetorically evocative fashion. The unbeliever is off the ark, alone at sea, and locked out of the garden.

⁶³⁹Genesis 12:1.

⁶⁴⁰Q 43:26.

⁶⁴¹Genesis 1:28; 9:1; and 9:7.

⁶⁴²Q 35:39.

⁶⁴³Q 10:73.

The topic of the covenant in the Noah story serves the prophetic image of Muhammad as depicted in Ibn Ishāq's biography. Similar to the way in which Noah and God re-established the earlier covenant between Adam and God, Muhammad is depicted as re-establishing the covenant of earlier biblical prophets. The Qur'an describes how Adam broke the original covenant: "And verily We made a covenant of old with Adam, but he forgot."⁶⁴⁴ As mentioned above, it is this covenant that is then established with Noah. However, the Qur'an explains that a covenant is made with a number of prophets, "We exacted a covenant from the prophets, and from thee (O Muhammad) and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary."⁶⁴⁵ A direct lineage of covenant is established, beginning with Noah and ending with Muhammad.

To connect the Qur'anic text with the depicted vocation of Muhammad, the Qur'an says that when the covenant was made with these earlier prophets God foretold a messenger (Muhammad) who would confirm the covenant.⁶⁴⁶ The Qur'an's description of Muhammad's re-establishment of the covenant with Noah, affirms a unique vocational connection between Muhammad and Noah. They serve as prophetic bookends in the history of God's covenant with man.

In regard to the audience of Muhammad, the significance of the covenant is to serve as a warning to those who disbelieve and break God's covenant. The Qur'an states that a breach of the covenant will be punished.⁶⁴⁷ Muhammad's audience is meant to understand that he is continuing the covenant of the biblical prophets of the past and to break this covenant means that the listening audience will be punished like the disbelievers in the Noah story.

⁶⁴⁴Q 20:115.

⁶⁴⁵Q 33:7.

⁶⁴⁶Q 3:81.

⁶⁴⁷See Q 2:40 and 13:25.

In regard to the living context of this sacred text, the Qur'an hints at numerous challenges issued toward Muhammad from his audience. There were several disbelievers who doubted Muhammad's role of a prophet, and they refer to Muhammad as a 'madman' and a 'mad poet.'⁶⁴⁸ The implication of Muhammad's being a poet is that these revelations were created by Muhammad, rather than sent from God. It is to accusations such as these that the Qur'an responds: "He hath invented it? Nay, but it is the Truth from thy Lord, that thou mayst warn a folk."⁶⁴⁹ The Qur'an explains that Muhammad's role is to convey the 'Truth' from God in the role of warner. Muhammad's role is described as a 'warner' throughout the Qur'an.⁶⁵⁰ Muhammad's description as a warner in response to his audience is important because it links him, and his message, to Noah.⁶⁵¹ As a warner, Muhammad, like Noah before him, is warning his audience of the pending doom if they do not heed the word of God. Those who do not observe the warning will "cry for help."⁶⁵² In a curious manner, the Qur'an develops Noah's response to his disbelieving audience. Whereas the biblical Noah is depicted as quietly enduring the jeers of his folk, the Qur'anic Noah vocally admonishes his brethren. Through attributed dialogue, the Qur'an cultivates an image of Noah as a reprimanding messenger of God's covenant.

In the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis, the importance of Noah as a central character is evident by his righteousness, his willingness to follow God's command, and his involvement in the reestablishment of the covenant between God and Man. However, as much as the biblical reader learns about Noah from the Genesis narrative, there is very little that is learned from the dialogue attributed to Noah. In fact, for such a central character, Noah is noticeably terse.

⁶⁴⁸Muhammad is referred to as 'madman' in Q 15:6 and as a 'mad poet' in 37:36.

⁶⁴⁹Q 32:3.

⁶⁵⁰See Q 2:119; 13:7; 22:49; and 38:65.

⁶⁵¹Noah is described as a 'warner' in Q 26:115.

⁶⁵²Q 35:37.

Noah's lone statement in Genesis occurs after his son, Ham, looked upon his drunken nakedness, and Noah's other sons, Shem and Japheth, cover their father with a blanket. In response to this incident, Noah says that the descendants of Ham (Canaan) will be slaves to the descendants of his other sons, Shem and Japheth.⁶⁵³ Given that this is the only dialogue attributed to Noah in the Hebrew Bible it is correct to assume its importance in illustrating one of the implicit and fundamental purposes of the Genesis narrative: to explain how, or why, a tribe (or a group of people) is in the condition in which the Israelites encountered them. The purpose of Noah's curse of Ham, as the father of Canaan, is to explain the enslaved condition of the Canaanites as the Israelites knew them.⁶⁵⁴

Beyond the Hebrew Bible, the character of Noah is developed by dialogue in Midrashic accounts. Inside of rabbinic literature, Noah responds to the taunts of the disbelievers with a warning: "God will bring a flood upon you." Not only does Noah warn his surrounding audience, but he also prays to God for the safety of those among his ark: "Redeem us and save us!"⁶⁵⁵ Similar to the Qur'an, the Noah of Midrash warns his audience and prays to God. The character development of Noah through dialogue in Midrash is indicative of the ways in which Judaism develops Biblical characters and experiences alongside Islamic developments.

Nonetheless, there remain stark differences in the presentation of Noah between Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible. In contrast to the terseness of Noah in the Hebrew Bible, Noah is presented in the Qur'an with a significant amount of attributed dialogue. In comparison with the Genesis account of Noah, the increase in Noah's dialogical situations in the Qur'an produces a character which is more vivid. Of particular importance is the manner through which conflict,

⁶⁵³Genesis 9:18-27.

⁶⁵⁴Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), p. 110.

⁶⁵⁵Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews: Volume I*.

contrast, and confrontation with an opposing audience allow for a sharper delineation of Noah's personality.

In the Qur'an, the tension between prophet and audience connects the experiences of Noah with the depicted prophetic career of Muhammad. Like all of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, the Qur'an establishes a link between Noah and Muhammad. The way in which both Noah and Muhammad have to fend off accusations of madness creates a particularly strong association between the two. This connection enables Muhammad to utilize the powerful recollection of Noah as a warning to disbelievers. Central to the cautionary usage of Noah's story, the imagery of the ark is one of the strongest rhetorical components in the Qur'anic Noah's story.

The ark, as a metaphor, serves the rhetoric of later Islamic exegetical writing and political claims. In particular, the symbolism of the ark and the portrayed personage of Noah serve Shiite claims on sacred history and holy space. In his article, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shi'ism in Shi'ite Literature," Khalid Sindawi mentions two specific features of the Noah story that make it a good model for Shi'ites.

First, there is the element that "the fate of the believers, who escape God's wrath, in contrast to that of the infidels, who are subject to divine punishment. The second element is the salvation of Noah through Divine revelation and intervention, which for Shi'ites has been a source of inspiration for their own post-deluvian reality, for they see themselves as being 'in the same boat' so to speak as Noah's family."⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁶Khalid Sindawi, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shi'ism in Shi'ite Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, Nuova Serie Vol. 1 (2006), pp. 29-48, esp. p. 29.

Although it is not clear that the Qur’anic division between punished and forgiven is offered explicitly for just Shiite interpretations of Islam, Shiite exegetical literature makes a case for the certainty of “being saved because of their belief in their saintly Imams, whom they consider as their own lifeboats or ‘arks’ in the afterworld, as was the tiny minority of believers who followed Noah in the Ark.”⁶⁵⁷ Security from the lurking divine punishment is superimposed from boarding the ark to belief in the Imam. For example, in one Hadith that likens the Imam to the Ark, Ali receives the title “lifeboat.”⁶⁵⁸ Belief or disbelief in the Shiite Imams offers a divide that is similar to those on board of the ark; this is a divide between punishment and forgiveness.

Along with likening deliverance through the Imams to the escape from diluvial punishment aboard the ark, Shiite exegetical literature also contextualizes the Noah story into the space of sacred geography. It is where the occurrences of Noah’s story occur in the Shiite interpretations that most noticeably differentiate the Shiite and Sunni versions of the experiences of Noah. The Ark was constructed at, what is today, known as the mosque of Kufa (revered in Shiite tradition because it was the capital city during Imam Ali’s period of rule).⁶⁵⁹ According to different traditions, most claim Kufa as the departure but others claim it was the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.⁶⁶⁰ The Ark settled at Najaf, a Shiite holy city which holds the burial site of Imam Ali, along with the prophets Adam, Idris, and Noah.⁶⁶¹ The Ark passed over Karbala, revered in Shiite collective memory because of the martyrdom of the second Imam, Husayn.⁶⁶² Sindawi asserts that the inclusion of these details into the Noah narrative “is proof, according to Shi’ite belief, that this ground has been consecrated to prophets and Imams since the earliest times.”⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁷Ibid, p. 29.

⁶⁵⁸Ibid, p. 37.

⁶⁵⁹Ibid, p. 31.

⁶⁶⁰Ibid, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁶¹Ibid, p. 32 and 41.

⁶⁶²Ibid, p. 32.

⁶⁶³Ibid, p. 42.

Consequently, the story of the flood becomes a tour of Shiite sacred sites and Noah's prophetic experiences become inseparably linked to the Shiite story.

The robust developments about the Noah story in Shiite tradition indicate the degree to which the social persecution and moral rectitude of Noah resonate with the perceived Shiite experience. For this reason, there does not seem to be an analogous level of interpretive developments in the Sunni tradition. Similar to the way in which Jesus receives more attention (than other Qur'anic prophets) in Sufi interpretations, Noah appears to have an elevated status in Shiite interpretations.⁶⁶⁴

As Vali Nasr shows in his book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, much of the Shiite political and religious history develops in contrast to the activities of the ruling Sunni political entity. With the Sunni dominance in politics, many Shiite 'ulamā (scholars) shy away from government and move into a more spiritual realm of activity. As opposed to the purity and sanctity of the religious world, many Shiites, traditionally saw the political realm as tainted or tarnished. This view of government coincided with a rather pessimistic view of human character, where a guide (be it a prophet or Imam) is needed to keep people living in accordance with religious truth.⁶⁶⁵ Therefore, the story of the prophet Noah bringing a message to a wayward audience fits the Shiite understanding of the requirement of a requisite guide for humanity. Beyond that, the experiences of Noah responding to persecution from his surrounding audience can be likened to the experience of maltreatment from the Sunni majority unto the Shiite minority. In response to this history of perceived cruelty, the punishment of Noah's audience was used to demonstrate "the superiority of the Shi'ites over

⁶⁶⁴For more on the role of Jesus in Sufi tradition, refer to Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2003.

⁶⁶⁵Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

their enemies and oppressors.”⁶⁶⁶ With this example, there is an indication of the ease with which the Noah narrative in the Qur’an can be used in a rhetorically powerful interpretation. The usage and elaborate development of the Noah narrative inside of the Shiite exegetical tradition (rather than the Sunni tradition) indicates the way in which it is particularly apt for any individual or group with a longing to overturn a history of perceived discrimination.

Talking with Noah

John Wansbrough notices that, behind Moses and Abraham, Noah is the third most prominent figure in the Qur’an.⁶⁶⁷ The prevalence of Noah manifests itself in a wide array of ways. A close study of Noah in the Qur’an indicates that he is, at least, mentioned in 15 *surahs*. Separate from the narrative instances describing Noah, the people of Noah (*qaum nuh*) are referenced in nine *surahs*. In addition, the Qur’an mentions the religion (*dīn*) commanded unto Noah (Q 42:13), how God inspired Noah (Q 4:163), how God sent Noah along with Abraham and made them the progenitors of prophethood and scripture (Q 57:26), and, lastly, the wife of Noah (Q 66:10).

Although the Noah narrative is spread across different sections of the Qur’an, it does not mean that the story of Noah lacks consistency or congruency. The initial environment of the Qur’an was one where oral communication was prevalent and, as a consequence, memorization of a large body of work was necessary. With memorization comes an extensive knowledge of

⁶⁶⁶Sindawi, “Noah and Noah’s Ark as the Primordial Model of Shi‘ism in Shi‘ite Literature,” p. 30.

⁶⁶⁷Wansbrough, John. *Qur’anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

the vast amount of material contained in a text like the Qur'an. Writing about rabbinic literature, Martin Jaffee asserts that the Oral Torah was learned through an extensive process of "recitation, comparison, and critical analysis of memorized texts."⁶⁶⁸ The thoroughness of the memorization process enabled the rabbis to "knew their Scripture with a physical intimacy." The knowledge of text becomes "a possession as intimate as the taste in one's mouth, encountered textually as a presence lodged in memory, and brought to expression in the tongue's speech."⁶⁶⁹ The nature of an environment of oral communication (like that which existed in seventh-century Arabia) creates a situation where memorization is a necessity and extensive textual familiarity is a result. As a consequence of thorough textual knowledge, the Noah narrative that reaches across the text could be pulled together into a cohesive storyline. In fact, due to the feature of repetition, the prophetic stories as a whole are the best examples of how seemingly dispersed tales can be stitched into an interconnected narrative.

Among the direct and ancillary references to Noah in fifteen *surahs*, there are seven dialogical instances (Q 7:59-64; 10:71-3; 11:25-48; 23:23-30; 26:105-21; 54:9-15; and 71:1-28) that serve to develop the terse character of Noah described in the Hebrew Bible. The moments of the "talking Noah" provide the most detailed description of this particular prophet and the type of relationship that he shared with his initial community (which consisted of believers, unbelievers, and the undecided) and with God. The Qur'an's choice of Noah's conversation partners contextualizes the majority of his attributed discourse in the two most common forms of Qur'anic dialogue.

⁶⁶⁸Martin S. Jaffee, "A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Texts of Oral Torah," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 529-549, esp. p. 537.

⁶⁶⁹*Ibid*, p. 536.

As mentioned earlier, Mir counts seven types of dialogue in the Qur'an, but he designates two types as most prevalent and beneficial for a study of dialogue in the Qur'an. The first type is the "dialogue between a prophet and the nation to which he is sent."⁶⁷⁰ In this type of dialogue, the prophet offers his message in the form of imperative commandments, moral corrections, or blatant admonishments. In return, his nation will often discount the message or offer an outright rejection.

All of Noah's seven dialogical instances in the Qur'an begin with Noah speaking to his people (*qaum*). The familial relationship between Noah and his people, as indicated by him being referred to as "their brother,"⁶⁷¹ shows that Noah had been traditionally united with his people. However, the fraternal relationship is divided between those who follow Noah's message and those that do not. Along those lines, while Mir's reference to the "nation to which he is sent" (stated above) does provide a general definition of the prophet Noah's audience in the Qur'an, Noah's audience can be divided between those who listened to his message and those who did not. Robbins' use of Jeremy Boissevain's taxonomy of groups (mentioned in the previous chapter) provides a way to approach the nature of this divide within the nation.⁶⁷² Specifically, the two groups within this larger nation could be described as what Boissevain refers to as 'factions.' In the dialogical situations of the Noah narrative in the Qur'an the factions are made from the division among "Noah's people." We see that the faction within Noah's people, who overtly challenges his message, is referred to as the "chieftains" (*mala'*).⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 1-22, esp. pp. 9-10.

⁶⁷¹Q 26:106.

⁶⁷²Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, pp. 100-1.

⁶⁷³In the Qur'an, the term *mala'* is used to refer to the faction against Noah in the following verses: 7:60; 11:27, 38; and 23:24. The term *mala'* is used to refer to the factions among the people of Salih (Q 7:75) and Shu'ayb (Q 7:88 and 90) who were against their message. In addition, the term is used to refer to the chieftains of the people of Pharaoh who opposed Moses (Q 7:109 and 127).

In contrast to these ‘chieftains’ who challenge Noah’s message are those who listen to Noah’s warning of a pending doom and follow him unto the ark.

A consideration of the dialogue between Noah and the chieftains exhibits that it is Noah’s message that is the cause of factionalism between these previously unified groups. In response to Noah sharing his prophetic messages, the faction against him responds: “O Noah! Thou hast disputed with us and multiplied disputation with us.”⁶⁷⁴ Moreover, the severity of this factionalism is made evident when Noah says that he is coming as “a plain warner,” and the faction against Noah responds by saying that if he does not desist in preaching his message, they will stone him.⁶⁷⁵ Yet, the nature of this dialogically expressed factionalism goes both ways. In response to a pattern of mocking from the “chieftains of his people,” Noah says: “Though ye mock of us, yet we mock at you even as ye mock; and ye shall know to whom a punishment what will confound him cometh, and upon whom a lasting doom will fall.”⁶⁷⁶ This exchange is curious because, while, the chieftains only mock Noah, he responds to their contemptuous antagonism in the first person plural. It appears that Noah, as the leader of his faction of the *qaum*, is the target of the mocking from the chieftains, but in rebutting this antagonism he is speaking on behalf, of not just himself, but of his faction of followers as well. Perhaps, Noah is speaking on behalf of the faction of prophets who receive similar abuse from their surrounding audience. Situating Noah as, both, the lone object of derision from the chieftains, and the sole defender of his faction indicate his role as the primary authority within the faction. This is consistent with Boissevain’s contention that the leader is the central focus of the faction. Unequivocally, Noah stands as the central actor, or hero, of these dialogical confrontations.

⁶⁷⁴Q 11:32.

⁶⁷⁵Q 26: 115-6.

⁶⁷⁶Q 11: 38-39.

The second type of dialogue is the dialogue between God and a prophet.⁶⁷⁷ This type of dialogue appears in the forms of God offering encouragement to His prophet, providing a prophet with a message, or clarifying the nature of the message. It is often the case that the dialogue between a prophet and a nation and the dialogue between God and a prophet merge into a narrative sequence.

The occurrences of Noah's dialogue and of the types of exchanges that occur are as follows:

1. Noah and the Chieftains of his people (Q 7:59-64)

The first of Noah's dialogical instances appears in *surah 7*. In this *surah*, Qur'an presents a brief summary of Noah and the flood with a brief verbal exchange between Noah and his people. The Qur'anic narrator introduces Noah coming to his people and Noah announces the unity of God and the looming "Awful Day."⁶⁷⁸ This first instance of Noah speaking includes three of the central Qur'anic topics; a prophet talks about monotheism and the Day of Judgment. In this way, the Qur'anic reader is introduced to the personality of Noah through his declaration of these central topics. In response to Noah, "the chieftains of his people" say that he is an error and Noah, in turn, rebukes them to say that he is a messenger bringer a reminder of a warning for his audience. The way in which Noah says this is significant. Noah states that he brings "a Reminder from your Lord by means of a man among you, that he may warn you, and that ye may keep from evil, and that haply ye may find mercy."⁶⁷⁹ From the view of Waldman and Gwynne (discussed above), the literary motif of reminder (*dhikr*) is an essential element of the central Qur'anic topic of an enduring covenant from God. Beyond referencing the topic of the covenant,

⁶⁷⁷Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," p. 10.

⁶⁷⁸Q 7:59.

⁶⁷⁹Q 7:63.

this moment of speech also states the general function of the prophet as a *nadīr* (“warner”) and one who brings glad tidings. Noah’s declaration of his role is in accordance with Mir claim (mentioned above): the “primary function of prophets is to give good tidings and issue warnings.”⁶⁸⁰ Moreover, this dialogic instance of Noah introduces the central message of this prophet. Although prophetic stories are often categorized as punishment stories, they are also tales of mercy. The short dialogue closes with the Qur’anic narrator announcing that Noah and his shipmates were saved, while those who denied and were blind to the signs of the message were drowned. In this way, the account summarizes the divide between those who are punished and those who receive mercy.

In the realm of narrational texture, concluding this unit of Noah’s dialogue with the third person narrator’s account of events offers an impassive description of the flood. This storytelling style is in stark contrast to the more dramatic descriptions of the flood found in later *surahs*. Moreover, by relying on the more general description of events, as opposed to the very personalized experience of attributed dialogue, this account of the flood provides a big picture overview of the flood. This is an example of what Mir refers to as “Brevity and Detail,” which is the Qur’an’s “practice of stating something briefly and then amplifying it.”⁶⁸¹ While this may occur on a micro level inside of a given *surah*, it also occurs on a macro level when a brief account is given more depth and detail later in the text (as seen in this instance). By beginning the sequence of Noah’s experiences with this broad description of events, the text insures that the reader receives an overall understanding of the fate that befell Noah’s audience. After which, the Qur’an revisits this story, and the outcome of Noah’s audience, with a more robust description.

⁶⁸⁰Mustansir Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur’an* (New York: Pearson, 2008), p. 115.

⁶⁸¹Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, p. 132.

With the achievement of relaying what happens to an unbelieving audience, the narrative of Noah, across *surahs*, progresses to portraying emotionally evocative experiences from firsthand accounts inside of the events. Through dialogue attributed to central characters, the Qur'anic reader is drawn into the unfolding action. Like a funnel, the progressive texture of this repeated narrative moves from general overview to specific experiences of speaking characters involved in the unfolding series of catastrophes associated with the great flood. The repeated experiences of Noah in the subsequent *surahs* revolve around the way in which dialogue drives the story and describes how the involved personalities respond to the challenges and conflicts associated with the process of a shared prophetic message.

2. One sided dialogue with his people (Q 10:71-3)

This is a unique instance of dialogue because only a portion of the conveyed conversation is described. Like the previous dialogue, Noah is addressing his community of people with a reminder of God's revelation. However, in this instance the Qur'anic narrative provides no account of a reaction or rebuttal from Noah's people. In this brief recitation of dialogue, the reader is left with a one sided dialogue of a prophet calling to a community that is either not there or will not answer.

Repetition of Noah's story with an important variance has implications on how we process the progress of Noah's relationship with his community. With the oft repeated story of Noah, this is the lone occurrence of a solitary conversation. Ultimately, it is unimportant whether his community is within earshot of Noah's words or not. Whether Noah is talking to himself or to a community that refuses to respond, the implication remains consistent. This one

sided dialogue indicates the utter futility of Noah's task. His message is delivered to a community that cannot, or will not, listen.

Although his community will not listen, Noah retains trust in his message. Specifically Noah says: "If my sojourn (here) and my reminding you by Allah's revelations are an offence unto you, in Allah have I put my trust."⁶⁸² The ineffectiveness of his message does not sway Noah's belief. Through attributed dialogue we learn about Noah's unwavering faith in God. This is noticeably different from the Hebrew Bible, where it is through Noah's silent acceptance that we learn about his strong belief in God. In Genesis God provides his plan for the flood and offers elaborate instructions for preparation. As a response, the text tells us that "Noah did everything just as God commanded him."⁶⁸³ Without question or argument, Genesis indicates Noah's quiet obedience to, and belief in, God. In contrast, Noah uses his speech to publically declare his unwavering belief, even in the face of dispute from his community.

Moreover, Noah recommends the same degree of certainty from his audience. After Noah states that he trusts in God, he tells his community to "decide upon your course of action you and your partners. Let not your course of action be in doubt for you."⁶⁸⁴ Now that Noah brings his message, he tells his audience to be confident in their choice about belief. The conviction of their disbelief in Noah's message is depicted in the subsequent accounts.

3. Noah and his people and his son and turns to God (Q 11:25-48)

In one of the fuller descriptions of Noah, this section reads like a transcript of the dialogue between Noah and his people because of the lively back and forth between the two

⁶⁸²Q 10:71.

⁶⁸³Genesis 6:22. This response is repeated in the next chapter when it says that "Noah did all that the LORD commanded him" (Gen. 7:5).

⁶⁸⁴Q 10:71.

parties. The Qur'anic narrative offers rich imagery of the types of arguments provided from both of the speaking parties. The argument, itself, indicates that Noah has the attention of his people because what he says matters enough for them to respond to his message with scorn. Emotional depth is added to the argument when this account includes a record of the mockery directed toward Noah and the appeal to his wayward son. Hence, along with Noah feeling like the object of ridicule, Noah is conveyed as a grieving father. In particular, when Noah cries to God after the loss of his son, the Qur'an uses dialogue to illustrate Noah's sorrow and God's role as a source of comfort for the confused, lost, or saddened prophet. The Qur'anic reader is left with an image of Noah as the object of derision and the personal sacrifice he made in his decision to share and obey his prophetic message.

Beyond the display of Noah's personality, this exchange between Noah and his son indicates the development of the father-son topic in the Noah narrative of the Qur'an. While other Qur'anic prophets, like Moses and Abraham, break away from an unbelieving father or household, Noah's most prominent familial struggle is with a disbelieving son who breaks away from his house of belief. With these fractured connections, a family of faith supplants traditional notions of family membership.

A clarification and development of the family of the believers can be seen most clearly with the prophetic personalities of Abraham and Noah. The Qur'an reads: "And We verily sent Noah and Abraham and placed the prophethood and the scripture among their seed, and among them there is he who goeth right, but many of them are evil-livers."⁶⁸⁵ It may seem to be a complex assertion that prophecy, people who believe, and people who disbelieve are all within the lineage of Noah and Abraham. The Qur'an uses the stories of Noah and Abraham to

⁶⁸⁵Q 57:26

demonstrate the duality of belief inside of the prophetic lineage of these two prophets. In particular, the topic of the father-son relationship in the tales of Abraham and Noah points to the Qur'an demonstrating the behavior of a believing son and that of a disbelieving son. While the dialogical instances in the Abraham narrative mention an offspring (son) who is willing to be sacrificed, and is thus a believer, the Noah narrative of the Qur'an mentions the disbelieving son who will not be included in the prophetic family.

Although the Qur'an mentions Noah's wife as a disbeliever, it is his son who receives the most attention. From the safety of the ark, Noah calls out: "O my son! Come ride with us, and be not with the disbelievers."⁶⁸⁶ Rather than climbing aboard the boat of the believers, Noah's unnamed son says: "I shall betake me to some mountain that will save me from the water."⁶⁸⁷ Noah's son's plan to use nature as a means to be rescued from God's flood indicates an adherence to the divine worship of the natural world, which was prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia. In this way, he chooses reverence for the power of nature over belief in God. No amount of pleading from Noah can sway his decision and Noah is left to a discussion with God that centers on new lines of demarcation regarding members of his household.

Naturally, Noah believes that his son is part of his "household." However, God declares that Noah's son could not be a member of house, because "he is of evil conduct."⁶⁸⁸ From this we see that the defining criterion for inclusion in the house of Noah is not genealogical connections, but right conduct and belief.

By pleading to God in this instance, Noah is transgressing beyond the boundaries separating the human from the divine. Not only does God tell Noah about the sinful conduct of

⁶⁸⁶Q 11:42.

⁶⁸⁷Q 11:43

⁶⁸⁸Q 11:45-46.

his son, but God warns Noah about questioning His plan. In Genesis, Adam and his wife is warned about the dangers of crossing the boundary of knowledge that separates humans from God.⁶⁸⁹ Along similar lines, God tells Noah not to ask about matters that are beyond his station and Noah, as a model of belief, faithfully obeys. In fact, Noah asks for forgiveness and mercy on account of his questioning the fate of his son.⁶⁹⁰ From this conversation, we see the struggle between Noah the prophet and Noah the father, and we learn that the role of prophet takes priority. In this way, there is the assertion of the recurring Qur'anic argument of faith superseding family is asserted.

In the sequence of Noah's dialogical instances, this narrative unit is the first instance of the pattern where Noah shifts from conversing with his community to talking with God. This begins a design that is repeated in every communication that Noah has with God. Whenever Noah calls to God, it is preceded by Noah tensely engaging his community. This mode of a communicational shift portrays the sense that Noah's frustration, anger, and/or sorrow with his community cause him to turn to God for solace and for a solution to his suffering. As the delayed paraphrase repetition of Noah's dialogue shows across *surahs*, the divine solution comes in the twofold offering of mercy and punishment.

This *surah* connects dialogue between Noah and community and Noah and God in a slightly different fashion than the other *surahs* that include conversation between God and Noah. In *surah* 11, Noah's dialogue shifts from prophet and community to prophet and God, before ending with prophet and community again. The four subsequent *surahs* with dialogue between Noah and God begin with prophet and community and conclude with prophet and God. By concluding with the dialogue between Noah and his community, there is the sense that in this

⁶⁸⁹Genesis 2-3.

⁶⁹⁰Q 11:47.

surah the Qur'an wants to emphasize the tension between a prophet and his audience. In fact, the severity of the disputation between the prophet and his audience appear to be the primary focus in this instance of Noah's story.

4. Noah and the Chieftains of his people and turns to God (Q 23:23-30)

In line with all of the dialogical instances of the Qur'anic Noah, this verbal exchange opens with Noah calling out to his people with a message of monotheistic worship. Speaking for the general audience of his people, the leaders, or chieftains, reply with skepticism because they had not heard this message from their fathers. Specifically, the Qur'an reads: "We heard not of this in the case of our fathers of old."⁶⁹¹ These chieftains place primary obedience to their paternal traditions. A central topic of Noah's (and Abraham's) Qur'anic narrative is a reassessment of the father-son relationship. In a number of instances, the Qur'an asserts that belief in God should supersede familial allegiance. From the Qur'anic perspective, prophets, like Noah and Abraham, choose correctly by placing belief in God before obedience to family. In contrast, the loyalty of the chieftains to their father, and the ways of their father, over acceptance of Noah's message from God is antithetical to the central Qur'anic claim of the primacy of belief in God.

The chieftains' skepticism of Noah's message is made clear by their accusation that Noah is merely mortal and if the message was authentically from God, then He would have sent angels. From this line of reasoning, they exclaim that Noah has madness inside of him (as if he is possessed) because he believes this message to be genuine.⁶⁹² As a response to this criticism,

⁶⁹¹Q 23:24.

⁶⁹²This accusation connects the prophetic experience of Noah with that of Muhammad and is discussed below.

Noah turns to God for solace, who, in turn, provides Noah with instructions to build an ark and tells him who should enter the ark.

Rather than asking for judgment or punishment for his unbelieving audience, Noah calls for mercy. Noah cries out: “My Lord! Help me because they deny me.”⁶⁹³ In response, God tells Noah: “Make the ship under Our eyes and Our inspiration.”⁶⁹⁴ With the direction to build this ship as a response to a call for help, the ark becomes synonymous with divine mercy.

The shift in conversation between prophet and community to prophet and God continues a pattern begun in *surah* 11. The next three dialogical instances follow the pattern of Noah receiving criticism from his community, before Noah calls out to God. Unlike the dialogical sequence in *surah* 11, where the conversation between prophet and God is an intervening time separating dialogical instances between prophet and community, this narrative unit concludes in a verbal exchange shared by God and Noah. Moving forward, in the repetitive accounts of Noah and the flood narrative, this becomes the standard style for closing Noah’s dialogical instances across *surahs*. With this pattern, the reader sees that the Qur’an presents God as a source of solace for the prophet. In the larger tradition of the holy men (described above), this repetitive situation of the prophet retreating from the difficulties found among a hostile audience to the comfort of solitude with God echo the process in which a holy man exists in shifting space between communal involvement and periods of separation. With each retelling of the difficulties associated with Noah sharing his message, we get the sense that the prophetic task is increasingly difficult. So, it is not surprising that the prophet takes refuge in divine support.

5. Noah and his people (Q 26:105-21)

⁶⁹³Q 23:26.

⁶⁹⁴Q 23:27.

This episode begins with the proclamation that “Noah's folk denied the messengers.”⁶⁹⁵ The plural indicates that the denial from Noah’s people extends beyond the message of Noah and into the contemporary context of Muhammad’s message. In this dialogic instance, Noah is referred to as brother among the people to whom he is sent. Noah comes to his brethren and presents himself as the messenger of God. They respond with cynicism because they claim that the lowest members of the community follow him. This is curious because it indicates that there is a divide in the audience. The repetition of Noah’s story across the Qur’an gives the impression that Noah has related his message to his community more than once. In fact, the Qur’an states that Noah shared his message for 950 years.⁶⁹⁶ The lengthy duration of Noah’s prophetic career indicates a significant degree of determination on his part. From this view, Noah’s persistence has paid off and some are starting to believe his message.

Continuing with the pattern from earlier instances of dialogue, Noah states his role as a ‘plain warner.’ In response, Noah’s community threatens him with stoning. With this warning, the rejection of Noah’s message is escalated to the threat of physical violence and, across Noah’s instances of dialogue, there is narrative progression in the level of animosity between Noah and his community. In the repetition texture of the Qur’an, the near stoning of a prophet, or messenger, is a repeated situation. For instance, the pre-Islamic Arabian messenger Shu‘eyb’s audience states that they would have stoned him had it not been for his family.⁶⁹⁷ It is also important to note that this act of intimidation comes from Noah’s own family, because Noah is not the only the prophet in the Qur’an who is threatened with stoning from his family. In a

⁶⁹⁵Q 26:105

⁶⁹⁶Q 29:14.

⁶⁹⁷Q 11:91. Presumably Shu'eyb's audience was concerned about retribution from his family.

manner more similar to Noah, the Qur’anic prophet Abraham’s father threatens Abraham with a stoning.⁶⁹⁸ In this story of Noah, he hears the threat of stoning and is concerned by it.

As a consequence, Noah turns away from his community and towards God and asks Him to judge between Noah and his antagonizing audience. As an amendment to this request for judgment, Noah asks to for safety of himself and those who follow him. Noah is not arbitrarily requesting justice from God. The request from Noah to judge his audience is most likely driven by the peril of a potential stoning. This validates Noah’s call for justice and creates an image of Noah as one who would not make this call if it were not for his fear of becoming a victim of his wayward family.

6. Noah is called a ‘madman’ and turns to God (Q 54:9-15)

The verbal exchange begins with the repetition of Noah’s audience accusing him of madness. In the repetition texture of Noah’s dialogue, this is the second time that Noah receives the allegation of madness. The first instance, in a previous *surah*, reads: “He is only a man in whom is a madness, so watch him for a while.”⁶⁹⁹ In the delayed paraphrase type of repetition that appears in this *surah*, Noah’s audience succinctly calls him a “madman” (*majnūn*).⁷⁰⁰ During the fourth instance of dialogue (discussed above), Noah’s audience accuses him of madness, or being inhabited by *Jinn*.⁷⁰¹ In the intertexture between the Qur’an and the Hebrew Bible, the subject of prophet and demonic possession is exhibited when “the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.”⁷⁰² With this

⁶⁹⁸Q 19:44-46.

⁶⁹⁹Q 23:25.

⁷⁰⁰Q 54:9.

⁷⁰¹Q 23:25.

⁷⁰²1 Samuel 16:14.

passage, we see that that demonic possession comes at the exclusion of the divine presence. Returning to the innertexture of the Qur'an, accusations of madness are levelled against Muhammad on numerous occasions.⁷⁰³ In response, the Qur'an tells its audience that Muhammad is not "a soothsayer or a madman" (*majnūn*).⁷⁰⁴ The rejection of demonic possession serves to support the authenticity of the prophet's message. In the biography of Muhammad from Ibn Ishāq, there is a tradition where, after he receives his first revelation, Muhammad asks "'Woe is me poet or possessed.'"⁷⁰⁵ Both Muhammad's wife, Khadījah, and her cousin, Waraqah, deny his question of possession and the prerequisite illegitimacy of his divine message; they assure Muhammad of the truthfulness of his message.⁷⁰⁶ The accusations of madness in the Noah's dialogical exchanges with his audience illustrate the Qur'anic process of patterning the prophetic experiences after the experiences of Muhammad. In particular, the Qur'an uses the story of Noah as a means to address the accusations against Muhammad regarding the validity of his message.

In the progressive texture of the Qur'anic Noah story, the reader sees that there is an escalation of the charges levelled against Noah. Whereas before Noah's community claims that he has madness inside of him, the label of madman escalates the criticism of the prophet and sharpens their condemnation of Noah and his message. In a way, this accusation is the ultimate verbal attack against the prophet and once this slanderous label is leveled there is nothing else that needs to be said by other party.

Rather than engaging his community and debating their criticism of his message, Noah immediately calls out to God for help. While dialogue often opens a better understanding of

⁷⁰³See Q 37:36 and 15:6.

⁷⁰⁴Q 52:29.

⁷⁰⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 106.

⁷⁰⁶Ibid, pp. 106-107.

characters and situational challenges, the lack of dialogue can also be crucial in understanding the portrayal of a personality and the overall agenda of a given narrative. The decision to not attempt a response to his community indicates a sentiment of futility on Noah's part regarding his situation. In response to Noah's call, help from God comes in the form of rain gushing from heaven. So, Noah's requested help is delivered in the form of punishment for those who mocked him.

7. Noah, his people, and God (Q 71:1-28)

In this instance of dialogue, Noah calls to his people in warning but the reader is not provided with the response from Noah's community. Perhaps, we, as readers, are not provided with their response because (assuming that we have read the Qur'an in order) we already heard their constant rhetoric. Instead, Noah relates to God his efforts in calling to his people and in a detailed description tells God of the back and forth that occurred between Noah and his community. In a way, the information that Noah gives to God serves as a summary of the reluctance to accept his message of monotheism. More than that, Noah uses this as evidence for his closing call to God, where he requests to leave none of the disbelievers alive. This call by Noah to punish those who rejected his messages makes a logical climax to the unfolding Noah narrative that interspersed throughout the Qur'an. In each sequential narrative instance about Noah, the reader finds the audience denying his message and mocking him. Finally, in the last Noah narrative of the Qur'an, Noah reaches his breaking point and calls for the overt destruction of his detractors.

In the realm of prophetic dialogue, this instance of Noah's speech is unique because it is the only material in the *surah*. Unfettered by other prophetic stories or additional claims, this

surah is a clear narrative unit revolving around the final instance of Noah's speech with God and Noah's people. Rather than simply the material inside of *surah* that details a prophetic story, the entire *surah* may be divided with the structural element of the opening-middle-closing texture describing Noah's final Qur'anic account. Other *surahs* may also be divided with this tripartite divide. For instance, *surah* 54 (as detailed above) may be separated by its opening call to the text's contemporary audience, its middle section filled with a series of references to past prophets, and its closing section which returns to the initial issues that were directed to the contemporary audience. This chapter is different because of its sole focus on the events of Noah and, as a consequence, the opening-middle-closing texture discussed here addresses both the prophetic story and the entire chapter.

Along with the opening-middle-closing texture, there is also the structural element of narrational texture and the linguistic patterns of progressive and repetition textures that help us to locate the general layout and the rhetorical claims of this chapter. In this instance, narrational texture is the action and response between Noah and God and Noah and his people. It indicates the manner in which this narrative unit builds in tension toward a climactic final scene. The progressive and repetition textures on display here specify that the recurring elements of a warning of punishment and a call for mercy or forgiveness drive this instance of prophetic dialogue.

In the opening section of this chapter, the narrational texture fluctuates between God's calling to Noah, and Noah's warning to his people, and finally Noah's return to God to announce that Noah's community ignored his message of divine forgiveness. The middle section of this chapter shows an escalation of the confrontation between Noah and his people. He calls to them in every possible manner, publicly and privately, to proclaim all the divine deeds that support the

need to accept the promise of God's forgiveness. Finally, in the closing section Noah returns to God and states that his community schemes against him. As a consequence, Noah pleads to God that his people should be punished because they will mislead the believers and that the people of faith from his house should be granted mercy.

Q 71:1–28
<p>Opening:</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ</p> <p>إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ {1}</p> <p>قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ {2}</p> <p>أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُوا أَمْرَهُ {3}</p> <p>يَعْرِفْ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ لَا يُؤَخَّرُ ۚ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ {4}</p> <p>قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا {5}</p> <p>فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا {6}</p> <p>وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَاسْتَعْشَوْا ثِيَابَهُمْ وَأَصْرُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا {7}</p>
<p>Middle:</p> <p>ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جَهَارًا {8}</p> <p>ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا {9}</p> <p>فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا {10}</p> <p>يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا {11}</p> <p>وَيُمِدُّكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا {12}</p> <p>مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا {13}</p> <p>وَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَطْوَارًا {14}</p> <p>أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا {15}</p> <p>وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ سِرَاجًا {16}</p> <p>وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا {17}</p> <p>ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ فِيهَا وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا {18}</p> <p>وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا {19}</p> <p>لِتَسْلُكُوا مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا {20}</p>
<p>Closing:</p> <p>قَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَاتَّبَعُوا مَنْ لَمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالَهُ وَوَلَدَهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا {21}</p> <p>وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا كَبِيرًا {22}</p> <p>وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا {23}</p> <p>وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا ۗ وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا {24}</p> <p>مِمَّا خَطَبْتَهُمْ أَغْرَفُوا فَأَدْخَلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا {25}</p> <p>وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْنِي عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا {26}</p> <p>إِنَّكَ إِن تَذَرْنَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا {27}</p> <p>رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِيَ مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا {28}</p>

Q 71:1–28

Opening:

In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.

1. Indeed, We sent Noah to his people: "Warn your people before there comes upon them a painful punishment."

2. He said, "O my people, indeed I am to you a clear warner. 3. Worship *Allah*, and fear Him, and obey me. 4. He will forgive you of your sins and give you a respite for a stated term. Indeed when the term of *Allah* comes it is not delayed, if you only knew."

5. He said, "My Lord, I called my people night and day. 6. But my invitation did not increase them except in flight. 7. And, indeed every time I called them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers into their ears, and wrapped themselves in their garments, and persisted, and were arrogant with pride.

Middle:

8. Then, I called them privately. 9. Then I announced to them, and I confided to them privately.

10. I said, "Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever forgiving. 11. He will let loose the sky upon you in torrents. 12. And provide you with wealth and children, and make for you gardens, and make for you rivers.

13. What is the matter with you that you do not attribute to *Allah* grandeur? 14. And, indeed He created you in stages. 15. Do you not see that *Allah* created seven heavens in layers?

16. And He made the moon in them a light and He made the sun a lamp. 17. And *Allah* caused you to grow from the earth as a growth. 18. Then He will return you into it and will bring you out again. 19. And *Allah* made for you the earth as an expanse. 20. So that you may go along from it wide paths."

Closing:

21. Noah said, "My Lord, they disobeyed me and they followed him whose wealth and children did not increase except in loss."

22. And they planned a great conspiracy. 23. And they said: "Do not leave your gods and do not give up Wadd, nor Suwa', nor Yaghuth, and Ya'uq, and Nasr. 24. And they misled many, and do not increase the wrongdoers except in error." 25. Because of their sins they were drowned, then made to enter a Fire. So they did not find apart from God any helpers. 26. And Noah said: "My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from the unbelievers an inhabitant. 27. Indeed, if You leave them, they will mislead your servants, and they will not beget except a wicked disbeliever.

28. My Lord, forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house a believer, and for the believing men and believing women. And do not increase the wrongdoers except in destruction."

The opening section begins with God telling Noah to warn his people about a looming punishment. In response, Noah tells his community that God “will forgive you of your sins.”⁷⁰⁷ Also in this section, Noah tells God that his people’s response to the call of forgiveness is to “thrust their fingers into their ears.”⁷⁰⁸ Clearly, Noah’s audience is deaf to this message of forgiveness. Nonetheless, in the middle section Noah persists in sharing this divine forgiveness. He states that God is forgiving and commences with a list of evidence for God’s forgiveness, from the allotment of wealth and offspring to the very creation of humanity.⁷⁰⁹ In the closing section, the reader learns that Noah’s people did not accept this offer of forgiveness and they are all drowned. Moreover, the recurring call of forgiveness shifts from Noah sharing it with his audience to Noah requesting forgiveness from God for his “parents, and anyone who enters my home in faith, and all the believing men and believing women.”⁷¹⁰ Before calling for forgiveness on behalf of the believers in his house, Noah asks God to punish the unbelievers because, unless chastised, they will mislead the believers.

On one hand, we see that a warning of punishment appears in the first two verses and recurs at the end of the chapter. On the other hand, forgiveness is repeated throughout the body of the *surah*. Along with repetition, lack of repetition is also important. In the first line of the opening section, God tells Noah to warn his community about a looming punishment. When Noah turns to his people, he states his role of a warner but he brings a message of forgiveness rather than punishment. This shift from punishment to forgiveness is continued until Noah sees clearly that his message is ignored. Once the offer of forgiveness is rejected, divine punishment

⁷⁰⁷Q 71:4.

⁷⁰⁸Q 71:7.

⁷⁰⁹Q 71:10-14.

⁷¹⁰Q 71:28

is doled out. The repetition texture of forgiveness returns at the conclusion of the chapter, but it is a more selective appeal for forgiveness. The forgiveness which was initially offered to the audience at large, is now requested solely to the house and family of believers. In this way, the Qur'anic claim is that divine forgiveness is offered to all, but it is only received by the family of the believers.

Indeed, the Qur'an is careful about who is included in Noah's house or family. It is worth noting that Noah's son is excluded from this call for mercy because he is a disbeliever (as detailed above) and inclusion in Noah's house is based on belief. Yet, genealogical connection remains a factor for deciding on whose behalf Noah asks forgiveness. After asking for forgiveness for himself, Noah asks God to forgive his parents. It is unclear whether Noah's parents are believers or unbelievers. Perhaps, it is not important. In fact, as mentioned above, Abraham asks for forgiveness on behalf of his father, although his father is an unbeliever.⁷¹¹ Although we are left to speculate about the faith of Noah's parents, we do see that unlike his own progeny Noah is presented as a good son because he remembers his parents and prays for his parents.

The Qur'anic divide between the bad son and good son is a curious distinction. Abraham and Noah are good sons because they pray on behalf of their parents. Yet, Abraham is a good son despite breaking away from his father, while Noah's son is bad because he does not heed his father's call. The deciding criterion between these two examples is whether the parent is a believer. From the Qur'anic line of reasoning, the good son must break free from disbelief, but he should remember his family and pray for them.

⁷¹¹Q 26:69-104.

While the relationship between Noah and his family is complex, the relationship between Noah and his community is more direct. After they continually reject his message, Noah breaks away from his general community. Rather than praying for them, he requests divine punishment.

However, for much of this chapter Noah shows his community patience and clemency. God's first command to Noah is to warn his people about a possible punishment. Although Noah follows God's commandment and warns his community, he brings a message of forgiveness, not punishment. With Noah's willingness to follow God and call a warning to his people, the Qur'an displays Noah's obedience to God. With Noah's decision to shift the call from one of stern justice to utter kindness, the Qur'an illustrates that Noah's initial message is one of divine kindness. However, this repeated message of mercy is rejected and there is the escalation of the conflict between Noah and his community. The encounter between Noah and his people reaches a head when Noah in his frustration turns to God and requests punishment for his people and forgiveness exclusively for the members of the house of belief.

Although Noah requests punishment, the Qur'an does not place culpability for the destruction of this community on Noah. Before Noah requests that his people be punished, this chapter breaks from the pattern of depicting dialogue and shifts to a narrative summary of events to explain that Noah's people were drowned and thrown into the fire.⁷¹² By summarizing these events before Noah's plea to God, there is the indication that the plan for destruction was already in place and it was not the work of Noah. Rather, in accordance with the Qur'an emphasis on God's omnipotence, it was God, not the prophet, who was responsible for the punishment Noah's people. Like any Qur'anic prophet, Noah may request punishment or forgiveness, but God decides who receives either.

⁷¹²Q 71:25.

Talking with Noah: Concluding Remarks

More than a simple story of punishment, the Noah tales in the Qur'an revolve around the process through which a prophet overcomes humiliation and societal marginalization. Through delayed repetition, and across *surahs*, the narrative texture progresses the confrontation between the prophet and his community and the process through which divine judgment is reached.

While punishment and mercy are both elements of this story, the saga of Noah ultimately tells how this prophet, who is rejected by family (near and distant relatives alike) is able to defeat his challengers.

Divine omnipotence is reflected in these stories because Noah's success is made possible through the will of God. This power, though, is illustrated through the process of Noah besting those who criticize him and his message. Noah overcame his challengers through punishment for the unbelievers and mercy for the believers. In this way, Noah's story is developed into a powerful rhetorical device for the message of Muhammad and across the Islamic tradition. More than that, a liminal character becomes elevated to a divinely chosen survivor of a most dire case of social exclusion. Similar to the pattern of the heroic figure and the holy man, Noah retreats from his societal kin and kith network to isolated communication with God, only to return to his community with testimony of his divine experience. With this general view of Noah's Qur'anic experience in mind, the recitation of Noah and his tribulations become one of the strongest examples of the Qur'an's description of the prophetic experience. Noah's story is an example of the prophet's struggle to remain loyal to God's message and the reward of success for fidelity to what he witnessed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Solomon and Dialogue

This chapter examines the dialogical instances of Solomon in the Qur'an. As mentioned in the last chapter, the nature of the Qur'anic narrative presumes the reader's familiarity with the biblical stories. From that perspective, this study of Solomon will address certain character developments between the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an because the comparison of the biblical Solomon with the Qur'anic Solomon allows for a starker description of the development of Solomon.

Beyond comparing the description of Solomon between sacred texts, this section looks at the way in which Solomon's personality represents a distinct image of the Qur'anic prophet. Unlike a number of Qur'anic prophets (e.g., Moses, Noah, and Lot), Solomon does not come with a warning to his community. In addition, unlike many prophets, Solomon does not have a community to whom he is bringing a message. Lastly, Solomon in the Qur'an, like Solomon of the Deuteronomistic History in the Hebrew Bible is not simply a prophet; he is also a prudent king. In regard to these simultaneous roles, Newby writes that in Islamic tradition "Solomon is a prophet first and a wise ruler second."⁷¹³ While one part of his character takes precedent over the other, the vocational duality of Solomon adds complexity and distinctiveness to his personality.

The Solomon of the Qur'an does, however, bring, and share, a proclaimed message from God. Moreover, Solomon is presented with access to special and esoteric powers. Much like the Solomon of the Hebrew Bible, one does get the idea that the Solomon of the Qur'an possesses a degree of wisdom which surpasses that of the normal human experience. It is not surprising that

⁷¹³Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, p. 161.

the “story has captured the imagination of numerous writers and commentators.”⁷¹⁴ In large part, this is because “Solomon’s wisdom, his judgment, his ability to communicate with animals, his encounters with the Queen of Sheba, and his encounters with Jinn and devils have made fascinating reading.”⁷¹⁵ With all of these elements attached to the presentation of his character, Solomon is an alluring prophetic personality.

General Overview of Solomon in the Qur’an

Q 2:102 (A false understanding of the magic attributed to Solomon)

Q 4:163 (mentioned after Noah in a list of prophets) (Job is mentioned before)

Q 6:84 (seed of Noah in a list of prophets) (Job is mentioned after)

Q 21:78-82 (mentioned after Noah) (Job’s narrative is mentioned after)

Q 27:15-44 (**Dialogical instance**)

Q 34:12-21 (He is given wind and success)

Q 38:30-40 (**Dialogical instance** with God) (Job’s narrative is mentioned after)

Solomon between Sacred Texts

In Islamic tradition, Solomon is linked to the geographic space of Jerusalem. The association with Jerusalem connects the Islamic development of Solomon with the Hebrew Bible, in which Solomon, the king, is responsible for building the temple in Jerusalem. Four hundred and eighty years after “the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt,” Solomon began to build a house for God.⁷¹⁶ The temple in Jerusalem represents the fruition of the promise to Abraham.⁷¹⁷ Moreover, for the collective experience of the Israelites it represents the transformation from a wandering people to a people with a centralized home and sacred space.

⁷¹⁴Ibid, p. 161.

⁷¹⁵Ibid, p. 161.

⁷¹⁶1 Kings 6:1.

⁷¹⁷For the Abrahamic covenant, see Genesis 15 and 17.

Of course, Jerusalem is shared, and contested, sacred space between Islamic and Jewish tradition. After “the Ka'ba in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina,” Jerusalem holds the “al-Masjid al-Aqsa (the furthest Mosque)” as the third holiest Islamic site.⁷¹⁸ The mosque is revered because of its connection to Muhammad’s mystical night journey to Jerusalem, and the subsequent ascension through a series of celestial spheres. As discussed earlier, the traditions about Muhammad’s journey from Mecca to Jerusalem provide a rich narrative that binds together two of Islam’s holiest cities.

Although Fazlur Rahman asserts that the Ka’ba was prayed to in both Mecca and Medina, the commonly held view is that the initial direction of prayer (*qiblah*) for Muhammad’s growing Islamic community was Jerusalem.⁷¹⁹ According to Geiger’s somewhat polemical perspective, once Muhammad realized his inability to convert the Jews, the *qiblah* was directed toward Mecca (which the Arabs had already regarded as holy).⁷²⁰ Historically, the separation, or division, between Muhammad’s community and the Jews began with events around the time of Islam’s first military skirmish, the battle of Badr. For example, the *Sirah* recounts the change of the direction of the *qiblah* directly before the account of the battle Badr.⁷²¹ This literal shift of religious focus from Jerusalem (the sacred city of Jews and Christians) to Mecca (a city which was recognized as a sacred place of ritualized pilgrimage in pre-Islamic Arabia) is emblematic of the division that is being established at this point in Ibn Ishaq’s narrative account of early Islamic history. Bell sees this act as the “chief realignment of forces in Medina,” because it was an indication that the new religion was to be specifically Arab, and that Muhammad was going to

⁷¹⁸Abdallah El-Khatib, “Jerusalem in the Qur’an,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (May, 2001), pp. 25-53, esp. p. 26.

⁷¹⁹Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, p. 147.

⁷²⁰Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p. 14.

⁷²¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah*, p. 289.

rely more on the ‘arabizing’ party among his followers than upon the ‘judaizing’ party.”⁷²² In retrospect, this division is seen as a move to demarcate Islamic sacred space from central Jewish holy geography. Nonetheless, Jerusalem would remain sacred to Islam because of its connection to the initial direction of prayer.

In Islamic tradition, Muhammad is not the only prophet connected to Jerusalem. As noticed by El-Khatib, the “Qur’an speaks about Hebrew patriarchs and prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, David, Solomon, and Jesus, who lived in the city or passed through it.”⁷²³ Yet, the Qur’an is not explicit in its reference to Jerusalem. The best known allusion to Jerusalem appears in *surah* 17: “Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far distant place of worship (*al-Masjid al-Aqsā*) the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens! Lo! He, only He, is the Hearer, the Seer.”⁷²⁴ This verse would become the foundation for the elaborate traditions about Muhammad’s Night Journey.

Traditionalists (like al-Tabarī, al-Māwardī and al-Qurtubī) take more liberty with verses about Solomon to connect his experiences with the land of Jerusalem. On two instances, the Qur’an states that Solomon has power over the wind.⁷²⁵ When the Qur’an, in chapter 21 verse 81, states that the wind was “set by his [Solomon] command toward the land which We had blessed,” the traditionalists asserted that the ambiguous land referred to Jerusalem. To develop this inference, it “was narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that Solomon used to travel by the wind from Jerusalem to Istakhr [a historical town in the modern Fars Province of Iran], and he

⁷²²Bell’s *Introduction to the Qur’an* revised and edited by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1970), p. 12.

⁷²³El-Khatib, “Jerusalem in the Qur’an,” p. 27.

⁷²⁴Q 17:1.

⁷²⁵See Q 21:81 and 34:12.

used to return to sleep in Jerusalem on the same day.”⁷²⁶ With this liberal textual interpretation, early Islamic traditions indicate an inclination to mirror the geographic setting of the biblical account of Solomon.

Curiously, the interpretive developments of Solomon’s travel to and from Jerusalem connect the exegetically developed personality of Solomon with Muhammad. There is an extensive body of traditions about Muhammad’s *isrā’* and *mi’rāj*, or his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and the subsequent ascension through seven celestial spheres.⁷²⁷ Most likely, the earliest account appears in Ibn Ishāq’s biography of Muhammad, which Ibn Ishāq completed shortly before his death in 767 CE. Although Ibn Ishāq is a source for much of the material collected by al-Tabari, in his work *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk* (“History of the Prophets and the Kings”) there are the additional narrative accounts to the *mi’rāj*, such as the opening and cleaning of Muhammad’s breast (or heart).⁷²⁸

At the time when the Prophet became a prophet, he used to sleep around the Ka’bah as did the Quraysh. On one occasion two angels, Gabriel and Michael, came to him and said, ‘Which of the Quraysh were we ordered to come to?’ Then they said, ‘We were ordered to come to their chief,’ and went away. After this they came from the Qiblah and there were three of them. They came upon him as he slept, turned him on his back, and opened his breast. Then they brought water from Zamzam and washed away the doubt, or polytheism, or pre-Islamic beliefs, or error, which was in his breast. Then they

⁷²⁶El-Khatib, “Jerusalem in the Qur’an,” p. 26.

⁷²⁷The word *mi’raj* is Arabic for ‘ladder,’ but the term has come to refer to Muhammad’s ascension to heaven. This development is because some traditions describe Muhammad ascending to heaven via a ladder.

⁷²⁸A work which is completed some 150 years later than Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirah*, approximately in the year 915 CE.

brought a golden basin full of faith and wisdom, and his breast and belly were filled with faith and wisdom.⁷²⁹

While it is not explicitly clear if these three unnamed characters are angels, it appears that the placement of this cleaning, directly before the ascension of Muhammad, is meant to serve as an introduction to the *mi'rāj* account. The introductory placement of the cleaning of Muhammad's breast before the *mi'rāj* account can also be found in *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*.⁷³⁰ Ibn Ishāq does include the cleaning of Muhammad's breast in his *Sirāh*, but places the experience at a much earlier period in Muhammad's life.

In addition, Ibn Ishāq's inclusion of Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem alongside his ascension to heaven differs from later accounts which have the *mi'rāj* and the night journey as two distinct experiences. Nonetheless, Solomon and Muhammad's journeys to Jerusalem are similar because of the elaborate developments in exegetical literature from an obliquely mentioned Qur'anic reference to a 'holy place.' With this comparison, Muhammad and Solomon's travel narrative may be included in the larger body of interreligious messianic material that stretch back to the 3rd-century CE Enoch literature and the 2nd-century CE Christian Ascension of Isaac, where a holy figure defies gravity to reach a place of heightened religious significance.

Seeing as how both Muhammad and Solomon reach the temple of Jerusalem in their travels, their journeys could also be connected to the rabbinic *hekhalot* literature. The plural of the Hebrew noun *hekhal* which means "palace" or "temple," *hekhalot* refers to the heavenly

⁷²⁹al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari (Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk) Volume VI: Muhammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 78.

⁷³⁰See Volume 5, Book 58, Number 227 of Muhammad Muhsin Khan's translation of *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*.

palace, or temple, encountered by the prophetic hero during his journey. The text *Hekhalot Rabbati* (“The Greater Palaces”) is a collection of fragmentary pieces (microforms), and has been dated to sixth century Babylonia (with redactions in Ashkenazi communities of the Middle Ages).⁷³¹ Thus, it is contemporaneous with the authoritative Bavli Talmud. The text falls under the larger body of literature which Gershom Scholem calls “Merkabah Mysticism,” or chariot mysticism.⁷³² Although *Hekhalot Rabbati* is not considered part of the ascent apocalypses, thematic similarities between *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the earlier ascent apocalypses can be extracted from the fused fragments. In particular, the mention of a hierarchical seven heavens and the encounter of Enoch (in the form of the angel, and heavenly scribe, Metatron) harken back to earlier ascent narratives. While a thematic continuity of narrative details between the Enoch literature and *Hekhalot Rabbati* is evident, *Hekhalot Rabbati* has a distinct nature evidenced by the shift of focus from biblical heroes to rabbinic heroes. The details shared between this vast corpus of ascent literature and the flying journeys of Muhammad and Solomon indicate the ways in which early Islamic accounts about Qur’anic prophets fit in the larger space of shared interreligious heroic narrative developments.

More overtly, within the Qur’an, Solomon is linked to David genealogically and through occupation. David is Solomon’s father and they share the title of king. Specifically, the Qur’an asserts: “We bestowed on David, Solomon.”⁷³³ In addition, the Qur’an tells Solomon’s experience on the throne.⁷³⁴ Therefore, along with an intertextual connection revolving around central sacred space, there is also the familial and vocational continuity.

⁷³¹Peter Schafer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck: 2009), pp. 244-245.

⁷³²See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 40-79.

⁷³³Q 38:30.

⁷³⁴Q 38:34-40.

Nonetheless, the Qur'anic message of belief in God and His power comes to the fore with the character development and presentation of Solomon. Along with faith in God over a desire for material wealth, a central theme with Solomon is the power of God. This theme, however, is developed through first displaying the perceived power, or access to some mysterious knowledge, possessed by Solomon. This is similar to how the Hebrew Bible presents the judicious Solomonic character.⁷³⁵ It is only with the acknowledgement of Solomon's seeming strength that the Qur'an then illustrates the way in which it is ultimately God who possesses complete control of power and wisdom. The Solomon of the Qur'an reflects the tone of Ecclesiastes, with the process through which a king comes to terms with his limited mortality and the limitless divine power.

Talking with Solomon

Because of the infrequency of his appearance in the text, Solomon can be classified as a minor prophet. He shows up seven times in the Qur'an, with only two instances of attributed dialogue. Nonetheless, there is a focus on misconceived notion of personal power, a concept which appears throughout Solomon's Qur'anic appearances. Again and again, Solomon's perceived strength, or access to some esoteric knowledge is ultimately undermined by the exposure of divine omnipotence. Although this study is focused on Solomon's dialogue, the non-dialogical instances serve to broaden the Qur'an presentation of Solomon's place among prophets and they offer an overview of his arcane wisdom.

Solomon's first appearance in the Qur'an associates him with magic, while maintaining his belief in God. This section on Solomon reads:

⁷³⁵See 1 Kings 3.

“And follow that which the devils falsely related against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon disbelieved not; but the devils disbelieved, teaching mankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels in Babel, Harut and Marut.”⁷³⁶

In a fashion similar to the manner in which the Qur’an relates the prophetic audience’s misunderstanding of Jesus’ message, the text explains that it was ‘devils,’ not the prophet Solomon, who is responsible for the misrepresentation of correct monotheistic belief.⁷³⁷ As a consequence, in both instances the prophet is exonerated from any wrongdoing and a third party is held culpable for the misleading message.

According to the order of the *surahs* in the Qur’an, the next two references (Q 4:163 and 6:84) to Solomon place him in a prophetic lineage. The first list clearly places Solomon as part of the prophetic tradition: “We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms.”⁷³⁸ This list does have a curious ordering of the prophets who follow Jacob (up until him the order of the prophets is chronological) and it is discussed by Mir who says that “Jesus, Job, Jonah, and Aaron are grouped together on account of the severity of the ordeals they went through and the special Divine support that each one received.”⁷³⁹ Moreover, Mir claims that David appears almost as a footnote to the list as a means to focus “attention on the Psalms.”⁷⁴⁰ Similarly, Moses appears in the subsequent verse to draw attention to his place “as the counterpoint of Muhammad.”⁷⁴¹ This

⁷³⁶Q 2:102.

⁷³⁷For the Qur’anic reference to Jesus, see Q 5:114-117.

⁷³⁸Q 4:163.

⁷³⁹Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture*, p. 116.

⁷⁴⁰*Ibid*, p. 116.

⁷⁴¹*Ibid*, p. 117.

speculation is interesting and merits further discussion. However, for the sake of this study, it is worth noting the place of Noah and Solomon in the list. Their places at the beginning and end of the list serve as bookends in the described order of ‘inspired’ biblical prophets.

The second account serves to illustrate Solomon’s place in the prophetic line. There is, however, an inconsistency in the order of the prophetic heritage. For example, whereas previously Job and Aaron are mentioned before Solomon, the list in *surah* 4 reads: “And we bestowed upon him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did we guide aforetime; and his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good.”⁷⁴² Although this verse exhibits a different prophetic order, it serves to show that Solomon is part of a specific genealogy/lineage (*dhurriyya*).

With this disregard for the arrangement of prophets, we see that prophetic order is not as important as prophetic lineage. Although the Qur’an states that Muhammad is the last in the line of the prophets, the shared familial heritage of the prophet receives significant attention.⁷⁴³ Outside of the Qur’an, Ibn Ishaq’s biography of Muhammad begins with a genealogical heritage that stretches back to the prophet Adam and through Abraham. Similarly, in the sacred text of the New Testament, Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus that stretches back to Abraham.⁷⁴⁴ Moreover, in the Book of Acts, Peter reminds his audience that “you are heirs of the prophets” because of the divine promise to Abraham that ““Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.””⁷⁴⁵ The Qur’an is more explicit in its support of this prophetic family. As stated earlier, the Qur’an mentions a “family of Abraham” which Allah “prefers.”⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴²Q 6:84.

⁷⁴³Q 33:40.

⁷⁴⁴Matthew 1.

⁷⁴⁵Acts 3:25.

⁷⁴⁶Q 3:33.

This reiterates the notion of a specific prophetic family and it situates Solomon within this ancestral tree.

The remaining non-dialogical Qur'anic accounts discuss the specific types of power and esoteric wisdom possessed by Solomon. In *surah* 21, the Qur'an states that Solomon, along with David, received "judgment concerning the field, when people's sheep had strayed and browsed therein by night; and We were witnesses (*shāhid*) to their judgment."⁷⁴⁷ Although the biblical David is a shepherd, Solomon is not. Nonetheless, the Qur'an asserts that both had, what can be described, as an innate sense to locate stray members of the flock.

Solomon of the Bible is able to make judgments with wisdom and impartiality, as we see when two "harlots" come to King Solomon to ask about disputed ownership of a child.⁷⁴⁸ The attribution of wisdom to Solomon continues in the Qur'an: "And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and unto each of them We gave judgment and knowledge. And we subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof)."⁷⁴⁹ The Qur'an includes the careful declaration that God (in the first person plural) is responsible for the designation of judicial and intellectual understanding. The attribution of knowledge from God continues in the next verse of the Qur'an, which states that God taught David the "the art of making garments (of mail)," or armor.⁷⁵⁰ The designation of the ability to make armor seems to relate to David's well recognized martial ability. The Qur'anic claim that David's battlefield success is caused by God indicates that, like his son, Solomon, God gives David his exceptional abilities. As is the case for the seemingly miraculous capacity for many of

⁷⁴⁷Q 21:78.

⁷⁴⁸1 Kings 3:16-28.

⁷⁴⁹Q 21:79.

⁷⁵⁰Q 21:80.

the prophets in the Qur'an, these connections between David and Solomon are consistent with the notion that God provides His prophets with all of their wisdom and ability.

The Qur'an, therefore, implies that Solomon's power over nature and the supernatural is because of God's awareness of these matters. "And unto Solomon (We subdued) the wind in its raging. It set by his command toward the land which We had blessed. And of everything We are Aware."⁷⁵¹ So, Solomon's control over the wind is because of Divine cognizance. In addition, the narrative explains that the "evil ones" (*shayātīn*) performed services for Solomon. "And of the evil ones (subdued We unto him) some who dived (for pearls) for him and did other work, and We were warders unto them."⁷⁵² However, this service is possible only because of the divine will, which serves as a guard over these somewhat ambiguous entities.

It seems that the, so called, "evil ones" refer to the supernatural Jinn who show up throughout the Qur'an, and who continue to play a prominent role in general Arab culture. On more the one occasion, the Qur'an explains that Jinn are created from an essential fire which is smokeless.⁷⁵³ Jinn in the Qur'an, however have a range of personalities. The Qur'an says that some Jinn have accepted the message of the Qur'an and its precepts. However, the Jinn are also quoted as saying that some of them do not believe in the message of the Qur'an. The Jinn identify the different paths between those who have surrendered to God, and those who are unjust; the ones who are unjust will burn in hell.⁷⁵⁴ Therefore, some Jinn have religion, and some do not.

⁷⁵¹Q 21:81.

⁷⁵²Q 21:82.

⁷⁵³Q 15:27 and 55:15.

⁷⁵⁴Q 72:1-15.

The destiny of Jinn, like humans, rest with God. The Qur'an is explicit in saying that the only way Jinn, like man, can get to heaven is through God.⁷⁵⁵ As a consequence, there is no difference between the fate waiting for unbelievers, be they human or Jinn. The Qur'an states that the same punishment of hell waits for the unbelievers among Jinn and mankind.⁷⁵⁶ The messenger that comes from God is sent to be heard by Jinn and man alike. Moreover, the Qur'an says that messengers of their own came to them: "O ye assembly of the jinn and humankind! Came there not unto you messengers of your own who recounted unto you My tokens and warned you of the meeting of this your Day?"⁷⁵⁷ Without specification as to if the Qur'an is addressing only man, or man and Jinn, the question emerges as to if the Qur'an is stating that were messengers who were Jinn. With this in mind, it is apparent that the Qur'an presents Jinn as similar to humans in nature and function. In particular, in comparison with the omnipotence of God in the Qur'an, it is the nature of both humans and Jinn to be diminished in power.

This weakened state of strength, next to God, extends to the figure of the Qur'anic Satan. In the Qur'an, it is made apparent that that Iblis/Satan is one of the Jinn. The Qur'an states that Iblis "was of the jinn, so he rebelled against his Lord's command."⁷⁵⁸ The implication is that Iblis was one of the unbelieving Jinn (as opposed to the Jinn which are mentioned above and believe in the word of God).

Next to the awesome power of God, the limited strength of humans and Jinn is a central theme of the Solomonic narrative that stretches across the Qur'an. In the religiously rich cultural environment of pre-Islamic Arabia, there were many polytheistic practitioners who revered, and prayed to Jinn. Therefore, the Qur'anic assertion that God had power over Jinn, in a manner

⁷⁵⁵Q 55:33.

⁷⁵⁶Q 7:38.

⁷⁵⁷Q 6:130.

⁷⁵⁸Q 18:50.

similar to the power He maintains over humans (prophets included), exhibits the seemingly limitless range of His strength.

**1. Solomon (along with David) speaks with God, then with a wide array of characters
(Q 27:15-44)**

In reference to Mir's taxonomy types of Qur'anic dialogue, as a whole, this instance of attributed dialogue is difficult to categorize. In the beginning of this narrative unit, Solomon speaks with God. The nature of the conversation becomes more complex as the prophet's conversation partners become increasingly varied.

The general focus of this section of dialogue revolves around the central theme of concern with political power and material wealth as opposed to religious belief. This theme indicates the overall function of the Solomon story. First, the accounts of this prophet are meant to show that although Solomon may exhibit an array of skills (from controlling nature to speaking with animals) ultimate power rests with God. Solomon is powerful because God provided him with that power. Second, the Solomon of the Qur'an struggles with a fixation on financial wealth. This is an internal struggle with himself and an external struggle with the Queen of Sheba. The Qur'an utilizes the story of Solomon to make the claim that obedience to God should supersede a desire for material wealth. Through the general texture of this dialogical account (and more explicitly in the second instance of Solomon's dialogue with God), the text constructs a case to support the claims of divine power over material goods.

While not a central focus of the text, material wealth, or more specifically warnings about wealth appear numerous times in the Qur'an. Abdul-Raof notices that wealth is a central focus of many of the *surahs* which are located toward the end of the Qur'an. He lists wealth as a

central focus of the following *surahs*: 69, 89, 92, 100, 102, 104, and 111.⁷⁵⁹ This focus revolves around the ways in which a desire for wealth can distract someone from correct worship and belief. Although these *surahs* come at the end of the canonized order of the Qur'an, they are all said to be revealed during the Meccan period, or the beginning of Muhammad's prophetic career. From the perspective that Qur'anic chapters relate to specific periods in the life of Muhammad, it is unsurprising that a Qur'anic message regarding a turn away from wealth and a turn toward belief would come during a time in which it is said in the *Sira* that the economic concerns of the Meccan community were threatening the developing message of Muhammad. The most developed of the Qur'anic calls to move away from material concerns appears in this dialogic instance of Solomon.

This lengthy segment opens with the familiar Qur'anic topic of the father-son relationship. However, unlike the fractured relationships in the Noah, Abraham, and Moses narratives, this father and son are united in their belief. Speaking to God together, David and Solomon are unified in their worship. Dialogue indicates the confrontation of Noah with his son, Abraham with his father, and Moses with the head of his house, Pharaoh. In each of these verbal conflicts it is the assigned dialogue that exhibits the distance separating these personalities. In the case of Solomon and David it is dialogue that shows the close proximity between father and son. David and Solomon call out in a prayer of gratitude: "Praise be to Allah, Who hath preferred us above many of His believing slaves!"⁷⁶⁰ Speaking in unison to God, it is as if there is not separation between David and Solomon. They are not conversation partners, but David and Solomon are speaking as one person, one prophet. While dialogue can broadcast the dividing nature of belief, dialogue can also showcase the unifying nature of belief.

⁷⁵⁹Hussein Abdul-Raof, *The Qur'an Outlined: Outline, Theme, and Text* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2001).

⁷⁶⁰Q 27:15.

While it is significant to note the relationship between David and Solomon, it is also important to state the relationship between Solomon and God. In recognition of the receipt of divine favor, Solomon, with David, humbles himself before God in a state of praise. From here, the story about Solomon develops, but it is important that it begins with Solomon praising God.

After calling to God, the dialogue shifts to Solomon calling to his people. David's successor, Solomon, explains that, like his father, he received special gifts. "O mankind! Lo! We have been taught the language of birds, and been given (abundance) of all things. This surely is evident favour."⁷⁶¹ The declaration that Solomon learned the ability to communicate with a range of beings, rather than saying that this is his inherent skill, shows that this skill was provided to him by a power outside of himself. Indeed, the clarification that power and special skills were granted to Solomon is central to the Qur'anic presentation of Solomon.

Nonetheless, in Solomon's kingdom, all beings are obedient to him. The Qur'an tells us that the men, the jinn, and the birds are all organized before him. In this formation, Solomon and his minions come across the "valley of ants," where one of the ants says, to no audience in particular, "O ants! Enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies crush you, unperceiving."⁷⁶² The Qur'an explains that Solomon's receipt of this concern is a simple smile from the king. Rather than responding to this call from the lowly ant, the narrative texture progresses to Solomon calling to the most high authority, God, in prayer for the attainment of righteousness: "My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Thy favour wherewith Thou hast favoured me and my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing unto Thee, and include me in

⁷⁶¹Q 27:16.

⁷⁶²Q 27:18.

(the number of) Thy righteous slaves.”⁷⁶³ The progression of this dialogue provides the reader with an insight of the constructed personality of Solomon.

A lowly ant calls out in fear of the king and his court. In amusement, and with a mere smile in response, Solomon turns to God and requests that he be included as one of God’s righteous slaves. Solomon does not bask in the glory of perceived power over the lowly ant. Instead, Solomon humbles himself before God. Through the lens of dialogue, the implication of this section of narrative texture is that the Qur’an shows that the great king Solomon remains a humble prophet before God.

While Solomon is humble, he remains a strict taskmaster over the members of his court. In particular, Solomon is strict one who could potentially usurp his dominion over his kingdom. In the Qur’an, the hoopoe, or *hudhud*, is among the birds included in Solomon’s court. However, the hoopoe is portrayed with a rebellious personality that requires admonishment from Solomon.

The robust development of this bird’s personality is not peculiar to the Qur’an. Nancy Hatch Dupree asserts that “Hoopoe-lore through time and space reveals an amazingly wide range of roles and attributes.”⁷⁶⁴ Across cultural tradition the hoopoe bird has been conveyed in a myriad of ways.

The ancient Arabs ascribed many miraculous medicinal qualities to it while Persian poetic imagery credits the bird with such gentle qualities as filial devotion and virtuousness. Contrast this to the Scandinavian belief that hoopoe is a harbinger of war and that elsewhere in Europe the hoopoe is cast in the role of a thief. The Germans,

⁷⁶³Q 27:19.

⁷⁶⁴Nancy Hatch Dupree, “An Interpretation of the Role of the Hoopoe in Afghan Folklore and Magic,” *Folklore*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 173-193, esp. p. 173.

among other Europeans, assign to it scatological names and roles, and regard it as an obscene and phallic bird. On the other hand, precisely because of these same stercoraceous inclinations, the ancient Romans seem to have elevated the bird to the position of Patron Saint of Manuring. On a world-wide basis, then, the hoopoe is an ambivalent character, at times good, at times consummately evil.⁷⁶⁵

Within this wide range of associations, we get a sense of how the hoopoe bird has served different cultural narratives. Noticeably absent from Dupree's list of cultural characteristics is the way in which the bird is treated in the Jewish sacred literature (a tradition which is in close conversation with the text of the Qur'an).

In the realm of intertexture analysis between the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible, among creatures on the earth, in the ocean, and in the sky, this bird is recognized as distinct. Easily distinguished by its crown of feathers, the Hebrew Bible lists the hoopoe (along with a select group of other flying animals) as unclean and not fit for consumption.⁷⁶⁶ The separateness of the hoopoe continues into the Qur'an, where, among the members of Solomon's contingent of followers, it is the hoopoe alone who receives Solomon's scorn.

When the bird returns, he explains that his absence was caused by the discovery of a woman sitting on "a mighty throne" who ruled over a people that worshipped "the sun instead of Allah."⁷⁶⁷ As the hoopoe explains, by not worshipping God, this Queen (and her devotees) fails to see that God is the "Lord of the Tremendous Throne."⁷⁶⁸ That is, the Queen does not see that God is the source for anyone that acquires wealth.

⁷⁶⁵Ibid, p. 173.

⁷⁶⁶Leviticus 11:13-19 and Deuteronomy 14:12-18.

⁷⁶⁷Q 27:22-24.

⁷⁶⁸Q 27:26.

Solomon is hesitant to believe the hoopoe's report and sends the bird off with a letter to the Queen. She consults her 'chieftains,' who say that the course of action should be decided by the Queen. Out of fear that Solomon's army will decimate her city, Sheba resolves to send Solomon a present. Upon receipt of the gift, Solomon declares that what God provides is better than the material goods. It is seemingly in response to the misstep of sending the present that Solomon decides to invade the Queen's domain.

A member of the Jinn (referred to as '*Ifrit*') volunteers to bring Solomon the Queen's throne. In particular, this member of the Jinn "had knowledge of the Scripture."⁷⁶⁹ This clarification indicates that this particular Jinn in Solomon's court acts in accordance to, not in conflict with, the will of God. When the believing member of the Jinn brings the throne to Solomon, he recognizes this bounty as a test of divine gratitude and orders his obedient Jinn to test the Queen by disguising the throne.

The Queen recognizes her throne, while realizing the change caused by the disguise. This realization appears to indicate that she passes the test and, as a consequence, she receives entrance into a revered space. Specifically, it is said to the Queen: "Enter the hall."⁷⁷⁰ Inside this palace, of sorts, the Queen thinks that this hall is a pool of water and she bares her legs (she does this, it seems, to wade into the water). This misunderstanding leads to an unusual dialogical exchange between Solomon and the Queen: "(Solomon) said: Lo! It is a hall, made smooth, of glass. She said: My Lord! Lo! I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Solomon unto Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."⁷⁷¹ This somewhat perplexing interaction has been interpreted in a number of ways.

⁷⁶⁹Q 27:40.

⁷⁷⁰Q 27:44.

⁷⁷¹Q 27:44.

The stories about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba offer much in the way of comparative textual analysis. For example, Jacob Lassner references the Jewish exegetical work of *Targum Sheni*.⁷⁷² This rabbinic text fleshes out the biblical account where Solomon's rule is legitimized after he answers all the questions which Sheba asks of him: "Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her."⁷⁷³ In this rabbinic development, the Queen bares her lower body to reveal hairy legs, which represents a gender reversal and warns Solomon that there is danger in her independence.⁷⁷⁴ According to Lassner, the implication is that the Queen's role is sexually ambiguous; she is a woman who rules like a man. After Solomon answers her questions, and proves his wisdom, the Queen of Sheba declares Solomon's wisdom and praises God for placing Solomon on the throne.⁷⁷⁵ In this biblical account Solomon's wisdom overcomes the challenge posed by the Queen, and, by the Queen's admission, legitimates his rule. This shows the ability of man to control women and restore the natural order between genders.⁷⁷⁶ Moreover, the narrative exhibits how it is the role of man, alone, to rule as king.

The Islamic exegetical developments on this indistinct incident reflect gender issues, but they are more concerned with the concept of correct belief in God. Similar to the Jewish postbiblical account, the literary trope of the Queen's hairy legs plays into Tha'labī's commentary of the Qur'anic account found in *surah 27*. Tha'labī, however, attributes the hairy legs, not to a confused gender role, but to the lineage from the Queen's maternal ancestry; her mother was a Jinn.⁷⁷⁷ In Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* there is also the claim that the

⁷⁷²Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1993, p. 109.

⁷⁷³1 Kings 10:3.

⁷⁷⁴Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, p. 17.

⁷⁷⁵See 1 Kings 10:6-9.

⁷⁷⁶Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 34-5.

⁷⁷⁷Tha'labī is referenced in *Ibid*, pp. 59-60.

hairiness of the Queen indicates that she was a Jinn.⁷⁷⁸ Yet, correct belief is able to overcome the Queen's demonic ancestry, as is evidenced by her decision to become a Muslim.⁷⁷⁹ By shaving her legs of hair (the sign of the Jinn), the Islamic exegetical account describes her turn toward the correct belief of God and the turn away from her demonic heritage. Additionally, this act is in preparation for her taking a husband (in some accounts she is married to Solomon). The Queen is reluctant to take a husband after inhabiting an exalted royal station, but correct belief in God requires that she take a husband.⁷⁸⁰ As a consequence, the established power dynamic between genders remains intact and belief in God follows in due course.

Lassner claims that the Qur'anic account of Solomon's interaction with the Queen of Sheba is meant as a polemic against unbelief. Although, it appears that the recurring motif of the throne throughout the story indicates that material wealth takes a central place in this tale. By locating certain repetition textures inside any account, the general topics come to light. In the repetitive texture of this story of Solomon in the Qur'an, "throne" is mentioned five times in this section.⁷⁸¹ The throne may be symbolic of material wealth and the sheer frequency of its appearance points to its centrality in delivering the underlying message of this story. Moreover, this concern with, and a focus on, wealth is contextualized against correct belief.

In particular, this tale is meant to provide a lesson about not mistaking the value of wealth. In the Qur'an, there is a clear message that all power belongs to God.⁷⁸² Any material item which becomes the object of focused desire and attention could potentially rival God. As a consequence the Qur'an stresses that there is a great reward for those who spend their wealth in

⁷⁷⁸Ginzberg is referenced in *Ibid*, p. 218.

⁷⁷⁹As evidenced in Q 27:44.

⁷⁸⁰Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁸¹The "throne" is mentioned in the following verses: Q 27:23, 26, 38, 41, and 42.

⁷⁸²See Q 2:165.

God's cause.⁷⁸³ However, those who put greater value in wealth than in God are missing the Qur'anic message implicit in this story. When the Queen sends Solomon a present, he explains that what was given to him by God is greater than the gift brought by the messenger.⁷⁸⁴ In this way, Solomon is able to see through the façade of material accumulation; the Queen is not able to do this. Inside the hall, she mistakes a polished floor for a pool of water; a mirage is mistaken for reality. This dialogical instance reaches its zenith with an allegory that summarizes, perhaps, the central assertion of Solomon's story in the Qur'an. Wealth is a mirage and belief in God is reality.

2. Solomon speaks with God (Q 38:30-40)

The second dialogical instance of Solomon in the Qur'an, which can be categorized as a dialogue between God and His prophet, also revolves around the struggle between a focus on material wealth and mindfulness of correct belief. The repetitive texture in the accounts of Solomon stretches across *surahs* and it indicates a focus on wealth over correct belief recurring in this dialogical instance. We learn that the allure of wealth was the central component of Solomon's trial by looking at the opening-middle-closing texture of this instance of prophetic discourse.

Q 38:30-40
Opening:
وَوَهَبْنَا لِدَاوُودَ سُلَيْمَانَ نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ {30} إِذْ عَرَضَ عَلَيْهِ بِالْعَشِيِّ الصَّافِنَاتُ الْجِبَادُ {31} فَقَالَ إِنِّي أَحْبَبْتُ حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّي حَتَّى تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ {32} رُدُّوهَا عَلَيَّ طَفِيفًا مَسْحًا بِالسُّوقِ وَالْأَعْنَاقِ {33}

⁷⁸³See Q 2:262 and 274.

⁷⁸⁴Q 27:36.

Middle:	وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ {34} قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ {35}
Closing:	فَسَخَّرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ {36} وَالشَّيَاطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّاءٍ وَغَوَّاصٍ {37} وَأخْرَيْنَ مُقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ {38} هَذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ {39} وَإِنَّ لَهُ عِنْدَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَآبٍ {40}

Q 38:30-40	
Opening:	30. And We gave to David Solomon, an excellent servant; indeed he was one repeatedly turning back. 31. When there were exhibited before him in the afternoon the poised [standing] racehorses. 32. And he said, "Indeed, I gave preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until they were hidden in the veil [of darkness]. 33. Return them to me," then he began to pass [his hand] over the legs and the necks.
Middle:	34. And We certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body; then he turned. 35. He said, "My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower."
Closing:	36. So We subjected to him the wind to blow by his command, gently, wherever he directed. 37. And the devils [Jinn], every builder and diver. 38. And others bound in chains. 39. This is Our gift, so grant or withhold without account. 40. And indeed, for him is closeness to Us and a good place of return.

Before addressing wealth, this section references the complex father-son connection inside of prophetic stories. The topic of the relationship between father and son is repeated across many of the Qur'an's prophetic narratives and it appears in the opening section of this unit

of Solomon's conversation with God. In particular, the section begins by designating Solomon as a good son to the prophet David because the Qur'an describes Solomon as one who turns to God repeatedly.⁷⁸⁵ With this introduction we see that Solomon, like his father, is a believer; however, we also see that Solomon struggles with his predilection for the accumulation of wealth.

After the Qur'an establishes Solomon's belief, Solomon calls out to God that his preference for wealth has caused him to lose the remembrance of God. It appears that this desire for wealth has only increased after Solomon lost his accumulated prosperity, because he begs God: "Bring them back to me."⁷⁸⁶ The earlier instance of Solomon's dialogue (discussed above) indicates that belief prevailing over wealth is a central theme in the Solomon narrative of the Qur'an. The repetition of the theme in this chapter shows that it was not only Sheba who struggled with wealth clouding a view of correct belief.⁷⁸⁷ In fact, the severity of Solomon's longing for material accumulation causes him to lose remembrance of God. As shown by the close analysis of Moses' instance of dialogue above, remembrance is God's preferred mode of worship in the Qur'an. Moreover, the scholarship of Gwynne and Waldman indicates the way in which remembrance and a reminder (*dhikr*) are repetitive features of the Qur'an because they point to the enduring divine covenant. A longing for wealth has caused Solomon to forget, at least momentarily, the enduring covenant of past prophets.

In response to this lapse of memory on the part of Solomon, the middle section of this Qur'anic unit of dialogue includes a trial for Solomon that revolves around a throne.⁷⁸⁸ The position of a throne in this instance of dialogue is a delayed repetition from outside of this

⁷⁸⁵Q 38:30.

⁷⁸⁶Q 38:33.

⁷⁸⁷See Q 27:15-44.

⁷⁸⁸Q 38:34.

chapter. As it is stated above, in the repetition texture of Solomon's instance of dialogue in *surah 27* "throne" is mentioned five times. In the context of its usage in this chapter and in *surah 27*, it is evident that this term is used to symbolize material wealth. The repetition of the term in this chapter serves to remind the reader of Solomon's past struggle regarding wealth and of the way in which this remains a central element of Solomon's depicted experiences in the Qur'an. Moreover, it supports the assertion that a synoptic reading of Qur'anic chapters lends itself to a fuller understanding of the depiction of the prophetic character. Through this instance of synoptic reading, we locate the centrality of a struggle between wealth and belief in the overarching story of Solomon in the Qur'an.

In addition, the usage of a throne as part of a trial has a significance beyond the Qur'an and it places the Qur'anic presentation of Solomon in the tradition of the hero. It should be remembered that the folklorist Alan Dundes refers to a ceremonial event where a hero must pass an examination prior to taking a seat on the throne.⁷⁸⁹ As stated above, this moment of a ceremonial examination may be thought of as the prophetic initiation process and it is when the prophetic hero rises to accept his calling. Similar to the tense challenges faced by many Qur'anic prophets, this account of Solomon is an example of a trial by God.⁷⁹⁰ The placement of the trial in the middle section serves to present this trial as the climactic moment in the final instance of Solomon's appearance in the Qur'an.

The closing section of this unit of dialogue makes it apparent that Solomon does, in fact, pass this examination with his realization that belief in God should supersede material desire. In recognition of God's power, Solomon begs for forgiveness and requests that God bestow

⁷⁸⁹Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, p. 153.

⁷⁹⁰On many instances, the Qur'an associates a trial with the message of Moses Q 2:49, 7:141, and 14:6. The near sacrifice of Abraham's son (Q 37) and Noah's belief in God in the midst of his son's drowning (Q 11) could also be seen as prophetic trials.

sovereignty on him. In response, God makes the wind subservient to Solomon.⁷⁹¹ Moreover, “every builder and diver” is also made obedient to Solomon.⁷⁹² This appears to be in reference to an army of the Jinn under Solomon’s command in *surah* 27. God tells Solomon that these powers are a divine gift.⁷⁹³ The clear implication of this statement is that all of the special, or unusual, powers, attributed to Solomon are only allotted to him because of God’s will. These gifts were allocated unto Solomon because he saw, eventually, through the façade of simple materialism.

Solomon’s successful completion of the trial and his subsequent understanding of divine omnipotence concludes Solomon’s final Qur’anic scene by offering a sense of finality to the moral standing of this prophet. However, this final appearance of Solomon in the Qur’an displays the complexity of this prophet’s personality. In comparison with the biblical tradition, the Qur’anic prophetic character is absolved of any guilt (e.g., Joseph in *surah* 12) and he has no dispute with God’s message (i.e., there is no comparable Qur’anic scene to Abraham negotiating with God in Genesis 18). So, this process of Solomon struggling to move beyond material desires and attaining moral rectitude stands out from the prophetic stories of the Qur’an.

Solomon’s personality development in this unit may be traced by the repetition texture and the way in which this texture progresses the narrative. In the first verse of the opening section, Solomon is described as an “excellent servant” because he turns back repeatedly.⁷⁹⁴ The phrase is repeated in the middle section to explain Solomon’s successful completion of the trial. The Qur’an says that Solomon was tried “until he turned.”⁷⁹⁵ After turning, Solomon asks God

⁷⁹¹Q 38:36.

⁷⁹²Q 38:37.

⁷⁹³Q 38:38.

⁷⁹⁴Q 38:30.

⁷⁹⁵Q 38:31.

for forgiveness and acknowledges divine power. This turn of Solomon symbolizes an act of repentance. The Qur'anic assertion that Solomon is an "excellent servant" because he turns repeatedly shows that repentance is a behavior that receives divine favor.

The activity of turning is commonly associated with the process of repentance. In Jewish tradition, repentance is connected to the concept of atonement referred to as *teshuva* ("return"). This concept is extended to "the case of *baalei teshuvah* (Hebrew, m. pl., 'masters of return'), men and women who are raised as secular or liberal Jews and later 'return' to the tradition of their forbears and become Orthodox."⁷⁹⁶ This act of turning is associated with a deeper religious relationship and it extends in Islam with the concept of repentance, *tawba*. Meaning "retreat" or "return," this notion of retreating from sin and returning to God is exhibited with Solomon's final dialogue with God.

The Qur'anic depiction of Solomon's experience of repentance are made particularly potent because of the period in Solomon's life when this moment of introspection occurs. In chapter 34 of the Qur'an, Solomon's death is portrayed and the repetition texture in this chapter points to a connection between chapter 34 and 38. Both *surahs* state that God subjected the wind and the Jinn to Solomon's control.⁷⁹⁷ This repetition alerts the reader to a linkage between the two chapters that extends into a description about the end of Solomon's life. While Solomon's death is spoken about in more direct terms in *surah* 34, Solomon is facing his fleeting mortality when he tells God that he preferred wealth over remembrance of God "until the veil [of darkness]."⁷⁹⁸ It is at this instant that Solomon recognizes his own shortcomings. Writing about *teshuva*, Yehudah Gellman asserts: "In the face of death there is a totally honest subjectivity, in

⁷⁹⁶Roberta G. Sands, "The Social Integration of 'Baalei Teshuvah,'" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Mar., 2009), pp. 86-102, esp. p. 86.

⁷⁹⁷See Q 34:12 and 38:36-37.

⁷⁹⁸Q 38:32.

which the person must either reject the life he has lived or accept it.”⁷⁹⁹ The Qur’anic scenario of a prophet facing his faults and returning to God creates an emotionally evocative scenario that adds depths of personality to the depiction of Solomon.

Talking with Solomon: Concluding Remarks

In no small part, the dialogical instances of Solomon revolve around God’s power and human recognition of that power. Solomon makes for a useful vehicle to extend the message about God’s powers because of Solomon’s characterization as someone who is seen as possessing wisdom, worldly power, and material wealth. However, as described above, the Qur’an is clear in its explanation that all of these are attained by Solomon only through God’s will. The lesson is that the acquisition of mundane desires may be attributed to God allowing this to happen and, in acknowledging the power of the divine, we should declare our belief in the supremacy of God. With these accounts about Solomon, we see that the prophetic messages serve to illustrate central Qur’anic arguments that stretch beyond a simple warning about a pending punishment. Prophetic stories offer an accessible portal to central Qur’anic assertions about God, His will, and the way in which He relates to humanity. In the case of Solomon, God may relate to humanity through the allowance of material gain and profound wisdom, but He may also take these things away. According to the Qur’an, the importance is that the reader recognizes that God has this capacity.

⁷⁹⁹Yehudah Gellman, “Teshuvah and Authenticity,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 1982), pp. 249-253, esp. p. 251.

CONCLUSION

Concluding Remarks on Prophetic Dialogue

If the Qur'an is about any one thing, it is about prophecy. It is through prophecy that the reader learns about the central textual claims because it is through attributed dialogue that the speaking prophet shares his message about correct belief and warns his audience about the danger of unbelief. Prophetic dialogue provides an understanding of what the text says and how the text develops its way of saying it.

A study of dialogue does not only provides insights into textual arguments, but it also shows the Qur'an to have a greater sense of cohesiveness than is often assumed. While many scholars of the past, and many readers of the present, complain about the Qur'an's lack of unity, the recurrence of dialogue in prophetic experiences indicates cohesion inside of this text. The most clearly unified elements inside of Qur'anic *surahs* are the tales of past prophets. Inside of these prophetic stories, dialogue serves as the primary literary tool for progressing the narrative. Therefore, it is dialogue that drives the storyline and it is through dialogue that the events of past prophets may be most clearly followed.

Prophetic dialogue serves the interest of prophetic accounts throughout the text as well. Like many prophets, Noah and Solomon have stories that are developed across the Qur'an. The story of Noah, in particular, is built across *surahs*. By locating and following the repeated instances of Noah's dialogue, we learn about the way in which the Qur'an develops his story. Repetition inside of the Qur'an's dialogue serves to tie the text together. In the case of Noah, the repetition of his dialogical instances read in sequence indicate a narrative progression with building tension and an ultimate climax in the final dialogical instance of Noah.

Along with showing narrative progression inside of a *surah* and across the text, dialogue shows the distance that may separate or bring together conversation partners. The space between actors is what constitutes drama. Inside of the Qur'an there is drama exhibited in the verbal exchanges between a prophet and God and between a prophet and his unbelieving audience. However, some of the most significant drama is exhibited in the complex father-son relationships depicted in the lives of the major prophets, Noah and Abraham. Albeit to a lesser extent, this familial dynamic also appears in the events of the most prominent prophet, Moses. With Noah, Abraham, and Moses, there is a drama of strife and disconnection. However, with David and Solomon speaking to God, there is a harmonious connection. It is with dialogue that we learn about the most dramatic relationships in the Qur'an, because dialogue shows the sharp divide or close linkage between conversation partners.

In all of these conversations it is the subject of belief that causes familial connection or disconnection. This dialogue illustrates the emphatic stress that the Qur'an places on a faith in God that supersedes traditional familial loyalty. It is this focus on belief that is the defining criterion for the distance between the members of a verbal exchange.

Through drama there is a sharper image of relationship between speaking characters. In addition, dialogue tells about uniform character and individual personality. The experiences shared by prophets are generally driven by dialogue and they express the prophetic character. The individual dialogue attributed to prophets in these circumstances give us a glimpse of the prophetic personality. Through this study of dialogue we encounter the formation of a prophetic mold and more fleshed out personalities.

The prophet Abraham is presented as an intent listener, who is both a good father and a good son. Although Abraham breaks from the idolatrous practices of his father, he remembers to

pray for him. Moses also shakes off the practice of idolatry. However, it is complicated by the accusation from Pharaoh that Moses formerly followed the ways of idolatry (an accusation which Moses admits).⁸⁰⁰ As a consequence, Moses like Solomon is that seemingly rare prophet who must admit to past transgressions. A more developed image of Moses' personality comes out with his silent obedience to God's call and his stated concern about speaking before an audience. He is a compliant prophet, who is filled with self-doubt.

Like Abraham, Noah is seen as a good son because he prays on behalf of his parents. However, it is the emotion that spills out of him during the prayer for his disbelieving son which displays his personality. An obedient prophet, Noah follows all of God's requests and endures a significant of taunts and jeers from his community as a consequence. It is only when he will lose his son to the rising waters of the flood that Noah's paternal affection pushes him to make an appeal to God. In this way, we see Noah as a compassionate father and son.

To a certain degree, Solomon is the most complex of Qur'anic prophetic personalities. By divine decree, Solomon is given control over wind, certain animals, and the jinn. Nonetheless, he struggles with a desire for material wealth. Yet, he is reflective enough to bear witness to his limitations and to make repentance. In this way, Solomon is by no means free from fault, but he does develop enough intellectually and emotionally to recognize any limitations in his understanding of correct belief.

The Qur'an's uses these prophetic personalities to develop the ways in which the Qur'an makes its distinctive claim on established theological concepts like covenant, monotheism, and Day of Judgment. The recitation of the experiences of past prophets serve to remind the Qur'anic audience that the covenant remains intact and relevant through a distinctly Qur'anic

⁸⁰⁰Q 26:18-20.

monotheism. The most overt example of prophets clarifying the topic of monotheism is the instances of Jesus declaring his status as a mere prophet and his obedience to God. The instance of punishment and mercy stories of these prophets are meant to illustrate the possible options on the Day of Judgment for the recipients of the Qur'an. While prophecy is a universal concept shared between religions, the Qur'an takes a well-known vocation and fills it in with personalities whose attributed dialogue display the central claims of the textual narrative.

As a constant reminder of the larger sacred tradition inside of which the Qur'an is situated, prophets are revered in a role that is best described as heroic. The Qur'an utilizes this revered status of the past prophets to make its unique theological assertions, because the prophets from the biblical tradition were seen as trustworthy witnesses to an encounter with God. This gives their depicted experiences a status that can be likened to expert testimony. With this testimony, the Qur'an builds its case for its claims on religious truth. The Qur'an, like any religious text, is making a claim on having the monopoly on religious truth and prophetic dialogue provides the clearest testimony and most developed evidence to support this claim.

The significance of the Qur'anic claim on religious truth extends beyond the boundaries of the literary text and into the living context of the Qur'an. The experiences and the dialogue of the Qur'anic prophets are molded in such a manner as to reflect the challenges Muhammad faced when sharing his message with his community. In this way, not only does prophetic dialogue provide us with a better understanding of the Qur'an, but it can also shed light on the constructed depiction of the environment surrounding the Qur'an. Further research could develop the connection between the dialogue of prophets and the initial living context of the Qur'an.

Potential for Further Research

In the introduction to a recent collection of articles on the Qur'an, *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (2010), Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth criticize many aspects of the current state of Qur'anic scholarship.⁸⁰¹ Yet, contemporary scholarship has added important insights into the Qur'an and its prophets. For example, in his book, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (1990), Reuven Firestone provides a synthetic arrangement of the Abraham and Ishmael 'legends' in Islamic exegetical literature. This study offers a valuable framework for drawing together an allusive narrative, but it does not discuss how a similar approach may be taken with the Abrahamic material in the Qur'an.⁸⁰² In a more detailed analysis of a prophetic figure in the Qur'an, Neal Robinson's book, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (1991), offers a discussion on the role of Jesus in the Qur'an and Islamic literature. Unfortunately, the work is limited by a focus on the Qur'anic instances and Islamic commentaries which diminish the divide between Christian and Muslim views of Jesus.⁸⁰³ In his book, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (2002), Tottoli presents a study of the Qur'anic prophet that makes up for what it lacks in depth with its far-reaching breadth. However, research beyond Tottoli's book could contribute further details about the contributions of the prophet to the agenda of the text.

In the application of socio-rhetorical interpretation to the Qur'an, Gordon Newby and Vernon Robbins have done initial work. In their article, "A Prolegomenon to the Relation of the Qur'an and the Bible," Newby and Robbins adapt social rhetorics into Qur'anic studies as a way

⁸⁰¹A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context*, p. 11.

⁸⁰²Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990).

⁸⁰³Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

to locate and describe certain patterns of discourse in the Qur'an. In a more focused study of a socio-rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an, Newby's article, "Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse," investigates apocalyptic discourse in the Qur'an by locating certain inner and intertextual textures within three Qur'anic *surahs*. Additionally, Newby's work on socio-rhetorical interpretation of Qur'anic *surahs* indicates a model for how the unity of the Qur'an may be illustrated.

Social-rhetorical interpretation can serve as a method to develop the assertions made in some of the more recent literary studies of the Qur'an which assume the unity of the text. In his article, "The Qur'an in Process," Nicholas Sinai, in accordance with Mir's view that the Qur'an is a unified work which thematically interacts with itself, claims that Muhammad's initial community understood the Qur'an as authoritative text from its initial stages of reception. Rather than accepting that the earliest recipients of the Qur'anic narrative discarded or forgot portions of the discourse after their first recitation, Sinai suggests that during the gradual emergence of the Qur'anic text each segment commanded a "proto-canonical standing." When the Qur'anic audience placed authoritative status on each Qur'anic portion from its initial inception, they understood later sections by relating them to the earlier revealed segments of the Qur'an.⁸⁰⁴ From Sinai's perspective, to understand the Qur'an as a literary work that reflects its interaction with its initial social milieu requires reading *surahs* and portions of the Qur'anic discourse in relation to one another. To develop some of Sinai's assertions, the socio-rhetorical method of inner textual analysis elucidates the underlying patterns in the text which make available a reading between different sections of the narrative.

⁸⁰⁴Nicholas Sinai, "Qur'an in Process," *The Qur'an in Context*, pp. 430-2.

In his article, “The ‘Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood,” Hartmut Bobzin implements hermeneutical techniques that resemble the socio-rhetorical approach to inner textual analysis. Specifically, he traces the development and usage of the terms *rasūl* (messenger) and *nabī* (prophet) in the Qur’an. In particular, the study focuses on how these terms developed between the Meccan and Medinan verses. While his conclusion that the Qur’an presents Muhammad in Mecca as a messenger who is sent to his people with a warning of the coming Day of Judgment and Muhammad in Medina as a chosen prophet is too strict to be accepted uncritically, Bobzin does show that using repetition texture helps to contextualize how the topics of prophet and messenger are utilized throughout the text.⁸⁰⁵ Bobzin’s use of this approach is important in the development of Qur’anic studies because it demonstrates how a literary study of the Qur’an may be done without the myopic method of concentrating solely on specific verses or sections of Qur’anic discourse.

Within the current environment of Qur’anic scholarship, one way in which to develop this dissertation for further research would be to apply socio-rhetorical analytic tools to the dialogue of the other speaking prophets in the Qur’an. Beyond that, using socio-rhetorical interpretation as the methodological approach to a comparative study of the prophetic narratives in the Qur’an would help to elucidate the individualities and generalities of the prophetic character. Ultimately, through this project and future studies, it is possible that a more comprehensive image of each prophet and how he serves the overarching claims of the Qur’an may be achieved.

⁸⁰⁵Hartmut Bobzin, “The ‘Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muhammad’s Prophethood,” *The Qur’an in Context*, pp. 565-84.

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