

Muhammad, Prophet of God by Daniel C. Peterson.
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What kind of a man was Muhammad (c.570 – c.632)? Is he the last and final prophet of God? Peterson begins his biography with Muhammad's impoverished and orphaned childhood highlighting Muhammad's evident strength of will, character, and resourcefulness. He then moves through the prophet's life, detailing Muhammad's visions and revelations and examining the beginning of a religion that continues to affect the world in dramatic ways.

The text of the *Koran* is said to be conveyed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel in Arabic over a twenty-three year period. Muslims believe it is uncreated, dictated, unchangeable, untouchable, preserved on an eternal tablet in heaven. It is the incarnation of a book. Peterson shows the Arabian character of the new religion. He argues that the Islamic rituals owe a great deal to the traditions, not only of pre-Islamic Arabia but also of the wider ancient Near East. Muhammad's message was not a novelty; it was a new synthesis of ideas that had been present in Arabia for many decades. Yet Muslims believe that the *Koran* is utterly and universally applicable for all mankind. Islam, therefore, claims to be the truth, the ultimate word from the God who made the world as to what is true and how we should live. It does not tolerate disbelief in areas it controls.

Muhammad demanded total obedience of his followers. A Muslim, therefore, must submit to the judgments, teachings and ways of Muhammad. The *Koran* says, "They can have no faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission" (Sura 4:65). And "He who obeys the Messenger (Muhammad), has indeed obeyed Allah" (Sura 4:80). Peterson shows clearly that from the onset the marital and martyr spirit had taken root in Islam. Muhammad enjoined believers to slay unbelievers wherever they can be found and to continue to fight until "religion should be only for Allah" (Sura 8:39). He also declared that the soul of any man killed for the Muslim cause will go immediately into the paradise of God. Even if we recognize that millions in the Muslim world do not share the murderous ideology of the Jihadists, we still do well to remember that the very word "Islam" means submission. It would seem, therefore, that freedom, as the liberal-democratic tradition construes freedom, is, in fact un-Islamic. Consequently, the religious and political values of Islam are antithetical to the freer and more vibrant West. Indeed, it is the divide we still see today.

Comment:

Daniel Peterson is a professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at the Mormon owned Brigham Young University (BYU). He received a bachelor's degree in Greek and philosophy from BYU and, after several years of study in Jerusalem and Cairo, earned his Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He served in the Switzerland Zürich Mission and for approximately eight years, on the Gospel Doctrine writing committee for The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At the present time, he is a member of a BYU campus bishopric. He also writes apologetic material for the Latter Day Saints. He posts his materials on his website:

http://www.mormoncurtain.com/topic_danielcpeterson.html, which I checked out. Since every author has a perspective, Peterson is no exception. He looks at the life and teaching of Muhammad from his Mormon perspective. His interpretation reveals some interesting theological similarities between Islam and Mormonism. Muhammad believed that the *Koran* superseded the Bible. The Mormons believe the same. Peterson says: "Joseph Smith sought to restore pristine Christianity following a universal apostasy, and Muhammad believed he had received the pure religion of Abram, Abraham, and the prophets."

Joseph Smith (1805-1844) claimed that in 1822 an angel named Moroni told him where gold tablets containing God's revelation were buried. Smith published a translation of the gold tablets, the Book of Mormon in 1830, and in the same year started the "Church of Jesus Christ." The name was later changed to the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." Joseph Smith claimed that the *Book of Mormon* is the Word of God. The LDS accept the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price* as Scriptural. Islam believes in the miraculous reception of the *Koran*. Peterson calls the *Book of Mormon* a miracle. He claims that evidence and scholarly analysis strongly suggests that the entire book of 1 Nephi was dictated within the space of a mere week. This implies, he says, that 1 Nephi 1-7 was produced in little more than two days. And he claims that it is highly unlikely that so rich a text, so full of authentically ancient Near Eastern detail could have been written in so short a time by a semi-literate New York farm boy. "Joseph Smith's own explanation of the origins of the *Book of Mormon* rings far truer."

Like Islam, Mormonism rejects the doctrine of the Trinity as taught by the historic orthodox Christian churches. Peterson argues that the ancient creeds – such as the most famous *Nicene Creed* – were canonized in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. following centuries of debate about the nature of the Godhead. Consequently, he declares, it is highly questionable whether these creeds reflect the thinking of beliefs of the New Testament Church. And he claims that the revelatory manner by which Joseph Smith learned of the doctrine of the Godhead pierces through the centuries-old debate on the Trinity.

Like Islam, Mormonism rejects the doctrine of original sin. Peterson claims that the notion of original sin as it is usually understood today is a "distinctly late invention that evolved from the controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries." And he even argues that some scholars raise the issue that Augustine, and not Pelagius, was the real heretic. He also says that the doctrine of salvation through faith alone is not a "biblical doctrine."

The question is always: What must I do to be saved? In Mormonism the way of salvation is via "grace" and *human deeds*. Islam which influenced the lives of millions, stresses religious duties to which every believer must submit. Its theology developed into a closed system of religious and social rules as the way of salvation. The Christian message still is: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

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