

A Christian's guide to the Koran, Lesson 32, Talking ants, messenger birds, and frail spiders.

(Audio and pdf available on this website.)

Today, suras 25-29

Sura 25 is about "the discriminator," a special gift given to Muhammad, to rightly discern what is true and what is not. Unfortunately his first act of discrimination in this chapter is to deny that the God of Heaven ever took a son, an oft repeated theme of the Koran.

As stated much earlier, Muhammad's detractors are given a lot of space within the book, giving rise to many of our own objections. Here the Koran is called "but a fraud of his own devising and other people assisted him...and legend of the ancients," given by a mere mortal, perhaps bewitched at that.

It was a bit startling to me to see a call for holy war in this Meccan sura, verse 52: "So do not obey the infidels, and perform jihad against them..."

Following is a simple statement by Muhammad that Allah has "mixed the two seas" , that is, fresh water and salt water. As Dakdok points out, there is no great scientific revelation here, though Muslim scholars want to say there is. The circulation of fresh and salt water currents had been known since at least the first century.

Chapter 26 is called "the poets". They are mentioned only once, and that in a derogatory way, as one of the many groups Allah is going to judge eternally.

The Bible story of this chapter: another visit to Moses' time. Moses was placed in the Nile River at his birth, discovered by the Princess of Egypt, and raised in the Pharaoh's home. That Pharaoh was still living when Moses made his move against the Egyptians, when he saw one of his own being abused. He fled to Midian, was told by God that all who sought his life were dead, and he was sent back to meet the new Pharaoh.

But Muhammad again has not heard all the details of the story, and tries to make the two Pharaohs into one: "Did we not see you as a child among us, and you stayed among us many years of your life?" says Pharaoh to an 80-year-old Moses.

There is also some confusion about what land God had in mind for the Israelites. Allah is quoted here as saying that "We bequeathed [Egypt] to the children of Israel." That's a convenient statement for those who want to muddy Israel's claim to old Canaan.

Next to sura 27, "the ants." Right away we continue with another Moses story. Moses announces to his family one day that he has seen a fire. He promises to keep them posted on what's going on out there, and maybe even bring them back some of the blazing branches with which they can keep warm.

Of course, it is God he has encountered. "O Moses, surely I am Allah, the dear, the wise," titles we have come to associate with the Koranic recitations. He instructs Moses to throw down his rod, and the rod starts to shake before he can even let go. He then instructs him to place his hand into his pocket, and when it comes out it is white, that is, pure from evil. Leprosy is not mentioned. This latter sign is to be one of the nine plagues that will come to Egypt. I said "nine."

Then follows the tale of Solomon and Sheba. I say "tale" because it is far from the Biblical truth, and because it makes me begin to wonder if Muhammad truly believed the Bible stories, or the stories he was telling. Did he think that Bible history was just legend that he could play with in this way? That there was a truth behind the facts that was more important than the facts? I am making him sound like a Protestant liberal scholar, but it is hard for me to comprehend how he could have come up with these stories in any other way.

Translator Dakdok offers that at least a part of this tale is from the mythical *The Second Tergemon of the Book of Esther*.

Anyway, passing over the section about some talking ants, we move to the inspection of a very special bird of Solomon's day. He is identified here as a "hoopoe", but in the myth as a rooster. The hoopoe is missing one day because he has been traveling around, and has discovered an infidel kingdom ruled over by a woman, Sheba. They are sun-worshippers.

Solomon tells the hoopoe to deliver a book to her. He is to throw it down, and see what happens. Sheba receives the present. She reciprocates with a cash gift, which Solomon rejects, threatening to remove her from power. A demon of the jinn variety volunteers to bring the actual throne of Sheba to Solomon's palace. Sheba is escorted there too and after some difficult exchanges, she surrenders "with Solomon to Allah, the lord of the worlds."

In the Bible, Sheba's wonder is from deep within herself. Neither Solomon nor the God of Solomon threaten her. She leaves Jerusalem with happy thoughts about this Kingdom. We know no more. But may this be an object lesson for us and the Muslims in evangelism. Threats and counter-threats are not necessary. Show people the Kingdom. Let them take it from there.

The next verses (82ff) sound a lot like our book of Revelation. A beast rises out of the earth. The unbelievers are judged. A trumpet is blown. Mountains pass away. But here, all are commanded to be Muslims...

Sura 28, "the narrative." It is difficult to distinguish any particular "narrative" in this chapter as the one giving its name. There are several.

More Bible studies bring more questions. In verse 9 it is Pharaoh's wife, and not his daughter, who is attached to baby Moses so endearingly. Grown Moses, now on his way to Midian, is offered one of Jethro's two daughters. Trouble is, Jethro had seven daughters. Then Moses is offered that daughter in exchange for eight years of work. Sounds like Muhammad has confused Moses and Jacob this time.

Then Pharaoh again. Remember how he dies a Muslim as he is drowning in an earlier sura? No chance here. He mocks Allah, so "we seized him and his troops, so we cast them into the sea. So see how was the end of the unjust." No repentance here, not even between the lines.

That brings up sura 29, "The Spider." The spider of the Bible is a hearty creature, that winds up in "king's palaces." It survives there because of its skill and the strength of its house, strong enough in some species to hold a hummingbird long enough for the spider to kill and eat (I quote again Usama Dakdok.)

The Koran's spider is a bit less macho. "And surely the most frail of all the houses is the house of a spider," says Muhammad, comparing that frailty to the infidel who takes up residence outside Allah's house.

Verse 46 is key. It has been abrogated, say all the scholars, yet don't we hear it a lot in the West! "Do not dispute with the people of the book...except to those who have done injustices." Instead, just tell everyone that what has been sent to them and what has been sent to the Muslim is equally valid. Plus, "Our god and your god is one, and we are Muslims to him." This is clearly the ecumenical Western approach, used to get Islamic feet in the door. That it is working is without question.

An honest Muslim will tell you that this philosophy, breathed forth in Mecca, was clearly replaced by the jihad of Medina and our own day. The war is on. Only the sleeping will ignore it.

Muhammad offers the Koran itself as proof of the Koran in verse 51: "Is it not sufficient for them that we have sent down the book on you to be recited to them?"

No, not sufficient. Think of it. A man appears before me and tells me that the holy books I have believed in heretofore are now updated by me. Just listen, and take notes, he says. Everything has changed. And my proof is, Here I am in front of you!

Nevertheless, it must have been an awesome experience to have this "charismatic" man standing before you and your friends, telling you that the revelation you are about to hear is revealed by no less than Gabriel, and following up with the most fearsome of warnings, like the one that follows in verses 54ff:

"[The torment] will come on them suddenly while they did not feel. They hasten you with the torment, and surely hell will surround the infidels...". A full page of the Koran continues this horrific statement.

What would you have done? Your church is getting cold by the seventh century. Lots of doctrinal squabbles, little life. Political infighting as the Papacy is getting more strongly entrenched. People who are not born again flood into the church during the great persecutions by the suddenly Christian Empire. And here comes Muhammad, with something different from one calling himself "the merciful."

Why, it takes a lot less than that for credulous people in our own day to believe someone has a new "word from God." Beware, brothers and sisters. Hold on to God's Word!

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