

Muḥammad's Position among His People

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1. Introduction

It is generally considered that Muḥammad, the founder of Islam, led the faithful and fought with the enemy in his capacity as the Prophet or the Messenger of God. He was engaged in religious activities in Mecca for about twelve years and in Medina for about ten years, and during this period his position changed dramatically. While living in Mecca, a city thought to have had at the time a population of no more than 10,000, Muḥammad was merely the leader of a group of about two hundred followers, and the overwhelming majority of Meccans were either indifferent towards the religion of Muḥammad and his companions or else persecuted them. Muḥammad was, politically speaking, completely powerless against these people. Immediately after his move to Medina, Muḥammad acted as arbiter in negotiating a final peace between various parties embroiled in conflicts of varying scale that had been continuing for many years in Medinan society. About two years after having settled in Medina, he became the founder of a third form of monotheism with a ritual structure differing from that of Judaism and Christianity, and in order to develop its beliefs he became the political and military leader of his band of followers. The purpose of this article is to determine how Muḥammad himself perceived these changes in his position through an analysis of the verses of the Qurʾān (*al-Qurʾān*).

Historical sources providing information on Muḥammad's life have survived in the form of an enormous number of "traditions" (*ḥadīth*). In the past I have published a number of articles discussing the character of the *ḥadīth*, as well as articles in which I have utilized them as historical sources. But in the following I will keep the knowledge gained from the *ḥadīth* to myself, and I will not quote directly from them. In the mean time, care is needed when using the Qurʾān as a historical source, and I have also written in Japanese about the character of the Qurʾān as a historical source. I do not wish to repeat myself here, but I would point out that the most reliable research regarding at what point in Muḥammad's life the individual verses of the Qurʾān were revealed is that by Richard Bell, who broadly divides the deliverance of its verses into three stages. The earliest stage spans the period from about 610, when Muḥammad became aware that he had received a revelation, to about two

years prior to the *hijra*. The second stage covers to the period when Muḥammad realized that he had been conferred the Qurʾān by Allāh as something to be recited, and corresponds to the years immediately before and after the *hijra* in 622. From shortly before the battle of Badr two years after the *hijra* Muḥammad came to believe that he had received from Allāh a book (*al-kitāb*) in an organized form to confirm the Bible of the Jews and Christians, and the third stage extends from this point until Muḥammad's death. In the following, the periodization of the verses of the Qurʾān is based in principle on that proposed by Bell, and I have also generally used Bell's translation (although the verse numbers follow those of the Cairo edition).

2. Muḥammad is Commanded to "Warn"

Traditional Muslim scholars have generally maintained that one of the following two sets of verses represents the first verses revealed to Muḥammad. Regardless of whether or not they were in fact the first verses to be revealed, Bell too counts them among the earliest verses.

O thou clothed in the *dathār*,
 Rise and warn,
 Thy Lord magnify,
 Thy garments purify,
 The Wrath flee,
 Bestow not favour to gain many,
 For thy Lord wait patiently. (74:1-7)

Recite in the name of thy Lord who created,
 Created man from clotted blood.
 Recite, for thy Lord is the most generous,
 Who taught by the pen,
 Taught man what he did not know. (96:1-5)

In these two sets of verses Muḥammad is told to "warn" and to "recite," although it is not made clear whom or which group he should warn or for whom or which group he should recite. The following verse, also belonging to the early period, indicates the target of his warning:

But warn thy clan, the nearer ones. (26:214)

The words translated by Bell as "thy clan, the nearer ones" are *ʿashīrata-ka al-aqrabīna*, which could equally well be translated as "your nearest clan," with "your" referring to Muḥammad. What range of people did Muḥammad's *ʿashīra*

or "clan" encompass? The group of *ḥadīth* concerning this verse included in al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* identifies as Muhammad's *ʿashīra* various levels of kinship groups, ranging from the descendants of Fīhr (an eleventh-generation ancestor of Muhammad), corresponding to the anthropological term "tribe," to the descendants of his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, limited in scope to "family." But there is no need to interpret the word *ʿashīra* in terms of the concepts of contemporary anthropology, and it should suffice for us to ascertain the fact that it is impossible to determine on the basis of the *ḥadīth* what Muhammad's *ʿashīra* was. No other early verses give any indication of whom Muhammad may have warned, and during this period he was ordered in somewhat vague terms to warn those close to him and to recite for them. The range of his close associates would not have extended beyond the inhabitants of Mecca.

But the people who received Muhammad's warning and heard him reciting did not necessarily heed him. The following verses are also an early revelation:

Blast man! How ungrateful he is!
 From what kind of thing did He create him?
 From a drop!
 He created him, and assigned his power,
 Then the way He made easy. (80:17-21)

Allāh did not convey his message to Muhammad alone. In the above verses Allāh is addressing not Muhammad, but "man" (*insān*). Among the early verses, there are a number in which Allāh issues warnings to those who have rejected the message that He is attempting to convey through Muhammad.

Mention is also made of earlier examples of such people.

That which is due!
 What is that which is due?
 What has let thee know that which is due?
 Thamūd and ʿĀd counted false the Striking;
 As for Thamūd, they were destroyed by the Outburst;
 And as for ʿĀd, they were destroyed by a wind, roaring, violent,
 Which He impressed to service against them seven nights and eight days,
 continuously, in which one sees the people laid prostrate, like stumps of
 ruined palms.
 Does one see any of them remaining? (69:1-8)

Thamūd and ʿĀd were both legendary peoples of Arabia, and they were destroyed because they had deemed Allāh's message to be false. These verses are followed by further verses stating that Pharaoh and others were also pun-

ished because they “committed fault” and “resisted the messenger of their Lord” and verses alluding to a flood and a ship, presumably referring to the time of Noah. Muḥammad warned his contemporaries by citing the examples of groups of people who had been destroyed and no longer existed because they had rejected Allāh’s message. But during this period there does not seem to have existed the notion, made clear in the following period, that specific messengers are sent to specific groups. The “messenger of their Lord” whom Pharaoh and others had resisted is here not identified as Moses.

3. Muḥammad as Messenger and Warner

The second stage identified by Bell is that during which Muḥammad came to regard the verses which he was receiving as something that ought to be recited, that is, *al-Qurʾān*. This period, straddling the *hijra*, is divided into the Meccan period and the Medinan period. Towards the end of the Meccan period Muḥammad became clearly conscious of himself as a “messenger” (*rasūl*). I will cite from this period just one verse indicative of this:

Verily We have sent to you a messenger as a witness over you, as We sent to Pharaoh a messenger. (73:15)

Muḥammad was also a “warner” (*nadhīr*). Again, there are many verses which show this, and I will quote only two:

So flee to Allāh; lo, I come from Him to you as a warner clear (*nadhīrun mubīnun*);

And set not along with Allāh another god; lo, I come from Him to you as a warner clear. (51:50-51)

During this period Muḥammad also came to realize that there had existed people like him in the past, and these people now all bear individual names. Among the verses about messengers and those to whom they were sent that are to be found in many chapters (*sūra*) of the Qurʾān, let us here consider some appearing in Chapter 7.

We sent Noah to his people (*qawmi-hi*). (7:59)

And to ʿĀd (We sent) their brother Hūd. (7:65)

And to Thamūd (We sent) their brother Ṣāliḥ. (7:73)

And Lot, when he said to his people (*qawmi-hi*). (7:80)

And to Midian (We sent) their brother Shuʿaib. (7:85)

In these verses, the ʿĀdites are described as “successors (*khulafāʾ*) after the

people of Noah (*qawm Nūh*)" (7:69), while the Thamūdīs are said to be "successors after ʿĀd" (7:74). Muḥammad recognized a flow in human history, which had seen ʿĀd first flourish on earth after the annihilation of the people of Noah, only to be eventually destroyed and followed by Thamūd, which had also flourished and later been destroyed. And now the people to whom Muḥammad had been sent were also prospering, and he was warning them that if they did not accept the message from Allāh brought by him, they too would be destroyed.

Among the people to whom messengers were sent, ʿĀd, Thamūd and Midian (Madyan) are collective names, but the people to whom Noah and Lot were sent are not named. This characteristic is not restricted to the above verses, and applies to the entire Qurʾān. Muḥammad, like us, probably did not know the name of the people of Noah. Likewise, the "overwhelmed (cities)" (*al-muʿtafikāt*) appearing in verse 9:70, etc., would seem to refer to the people to whom Lot was sent, but presumably Muḥammad did not know their name either.

Among the people of Noah alluded to in the above verses, there were men of influence who resisted Noah. The following verse refers to the people of Noah:

Said the nobility of his people: "Verily we think thou art in manifest error."
(7:60)

Similarly, the following verse refers to ʿĀd:

Said the nobility who disbelieved of his people: "We think thou art in stupidity, and we think thee one of the false." (7:66)

Similar people were also found among the Thamūdīs:

Said the nobility who thought themselves great of his people, to those who were counted weak, to those of them who believed: . . . (7:75)

The word translated by Bell as "nobility" is *malaʾ*. W. M. Watt and others have argued that, at the time of Muḥammad, Mecca had an institution called *malaʾ* made up of clan leaders, but I am of the view that there were no formal institutions in Mecca at this time. It is true that there were unspecified men of influence in Mecca who would sometimes gather and make certain decisions, such as the boycott of Banū Hāshim who had given protection to Muḥammad. But there is no need to regard the councils which made such decisions as an institutionalized system. In my understanding, Mecca was a chiefless society, both as a whole and with regard to the smaller groups of which it was com-

posed. Muḥammad probably thought of the people of Noah, ʿĀd and Thamūd as being similar to the citizens of Mecca. But it would appear that, until the *hijra* became imminent, Muḥammad had no clear awareness of himself as a messenger who had been sent to people living in the city of Mecca, nor would he have given any deep thought to the social role of the messenger or warner.

4. Survivors and the *Hijra*

Although those people who had rejected Allāh's message in the past had been destroyed, it is stressed in verses 37:71-148 that while the majority of those belonging to these groups had been annihilated, there were also some who had survived.

Before them have erred most of those of former times,
And We sent among them warners.
See then of what nature was the latter end of those who were warned,
Except the servants of Allāh single-hearted. (37:71-74)

In the subsequent verses Noah and his household (*ahli-hi*) are referred to in the following terms:

We delivered him and his household from the great distress,
And We appointed his posterity to be the survivors (*al-bāqīn*). (37:76-77)

In the verses that follow, it is said about Abraham that Allāh "felicitated him with a mild-tempered youth" (37:101) and that He "delivered" "from the great distress" Moses and Aaron together with their people (37:115). In connection with the people to whom Eliyah was sent, it is also said: "But they counted him a liar, and lo, they are arraigned, except the servants of Allāh single-minded" (37:127-128). In the case of Lot too, he and his household were saved (37:134).

By this time Muḥammad would seem to have thought of himself as having been sent to the city of Mecca. The following verse clearly alludes to Mecca:

We never yet sent a warner to a town (*qarya*) but the affluent of it said: "In the message thou are sent with we disbelieve." (34:34)

Here Allāh has sent a warner to a *qarya*, which term is used synonymously with *madīna* (city) in the Qurʾān. For example, in verse 36:13 messengers are said to have been sent to "people of a town" (*aṣḥāb al-qarya*), but a few verses later, in verse 36:20, *al-madīna* is substituted for *al-qarya*. Muḥammad too was sent to the city (*qarya* or *madīna*) of Mecca, where the affluent did not believe in the

message that he had brought from Allāh.

At the time just before the *hijra*, Muḥammad had given up all hope for the citizens of Mecca. Muḥammad's view that the groups to whom messengers and warners were sent consisted of the majority who rejected Allāh's message and a small minority of believers was no doubt based on the situation in Mecca. And following historical precedents in which a small number of believers had survived in spite of the annihilation of the majority of the group's members, he decided to abandon the majority of Meccans, who were destined to be destroyed, and made plans to flee the city together with a few believers who would become the survivors.

How many a town (*qarya*) of greater power than thy town (*min qaryati-ka*) which cast thee out, have We destroyed, and there was no helper (*nāṣir*) for them? (47:13)

This verse dates from after the flight from Mecca, but it gives clear expression to Muḥammad's view that he had been sent to a particular city and that the city would eventually be destroyed.

5. Umma

The groups to whom messengers were sent are sometimes referred to as *umma*. Examples of this may be seen in the following verses:

We have sent to communities (*umam*) before thy time, and have affected them with distress and dearth. (6:42)

Thus have We sent thee amongst a community (*umma*) before whom other communities (*umam*) have passed away. (13:30)

On the basis of such usage, it is generally considered that *umma* is used in the Qurʾān as a special word signifying groups to whom messengers were sent. W. M. Watt writes: "It may be therefore that this word (*umma*) was introduced only after the founding of a new type of community at Medina was envisaged." According to Watt, on the occasion of the *hijra* Muḥammad set out to create a new type of community bound by ties of faith rather than blood, and he called this community *umma*. It is true that the word *umma* appears most often in verses from what Bell calls the Qurʾān period. But in actual fact *qarn* (and its plural form *qurūn*) is used more frequently in verses of the same period to refer to groups that were destroyed after a messenger had been sent to them. For instance,

Have they not considered how many a generation (*qarn*) before them We have destroyed? (6:6)

In addition, messengers were also sent to the *ahl-hā* of a *qarya* (7:94, etc.) and to *shiya*^c (pl. of *shī'a*) *al-awwalīna* (15:10).

There are also instances in which the word *umma* would seem to be referring to one section of the believers in Medina (16:92, etc.). It was therefore no more than one of several words used to designate groups of people, and it is not possible to detect any special meaning in this word.

6. Pharaoh and Moses

During the period immediately before and after the *hijra* Muḥammad evinced enormous interest in Moses as one of his precursors. It is already mentioned in the earlier verses that a messenger was sent to Pharaoh, but it is only from the time around the *hijra* that the messenger sent to Pharaoh is given the name of Moses. The story of Pharaoh and Moses is scattered throughout the Qurʾān, but it appears as a coherent tale in verses 20:9-97. The references to Moses found in various other chapters either present parts of this tale in greater detail or else repeat only a small part of it in order to draw the attention of an audience already familiar with the story, and there are no great differences in content. However, the story of Pharaoh and Moses differs considerably in content from other cases of messengers and their people.

The groups to whom messengers were sent may have included *mala*³, or men of influence, but their rulers or governing structures are not known. This is a reflection of the situation in Mecca, which was a chiefless society. But Pharaoh considered the kingship (*mulk*) of Egypt (Miṣr) to be his own (43:51). He lived in a city (*al-madīna*) (7:123, etc.), and there were other cities (*madā'in*) too under his rule (7:111, etc.). He also commanded an army, which is sometimes referred to as the army (*junūd*) of Pharaoh and Hāmān (his wife?) (28:6, etc.).

The Pharaoh as he appears in the tale of Pharaoh and Moses was a king with an army who ruled over cities, but the king and kingship lack concreteness. Muḥammad, living as he did in Mecca, would have had nothing to do with kings, although he was aware of their existence. In the Qurʾān, a king (*malik*) figures in the story of Joseph, spanning twelve chapters, and another appears in the tale of Moses' journey, while kings (*mulūk*) also figure in the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. But, as in the case of Pharaoh, these kings too have no real substance.

In Muḥammad's view, kingship (*mulk*) originally belonged to Allāh. In verses of this period it is emphasized that "the realm (*mulk*) of the heavens and the earth" belongs to Allāh (85:9, etc.) and that "the true sovereign power

(*mulk*) will then belong to the Merciful" (25:26), although Allāh would sometimes grant *mulk* to human beings. The following verse was given by Moses to his people (*qawm-h*):

O my people, remember the goodness of Allāh towards you when He appointed prophets amongst you, and appointed you (to be) kings (*mulūk*), and bestowed upon you what He had not bestowed upon anyone of all the world. (5:20)

These words mean that the ancestors and successors of Moses included prophets and kings. Allāh bestowed *mulk* together with "the Book and the Wisdom" on the family (*āl*) of Abraham (4:54) and also gave *mulk* to Joseph (12:101). After Moses died, a certain prophet said to the Israelites:

"See, Allāh hath raised up for you Saul (Ṭālūt) as king." (2:251)

In addition, Saul's successors David (Dā'ūd) (2:251, etc.) and Solomon (Sulaymān) (2:102, etc.) also possessed *mulk*. It is to be surmised that at this time Muḥammad believed that many kings had appeared among Abraham's descendants.

The Moses who appears in the tale of Pharaoh and Moses was a special prophet from among the survivors, who had produced many prophets and kings. When sent to Pharaoh, he was accompanied by his brother Aaron (Hārūn), who acted as his counsellor (*wazīr*) (20:29-30, etc.). It should be noted that the word *wazīr*, which generally means "chancellor," is applied only to Aaron in the Qur'ān. Moses and Aaron explained their faith in Allāh to Pharaoh and competed with his magicians, but in the end they led the Israelites under the control of Pharaoh out of Egypt. The Israelites thus became survivors, but whereas the subsequent fate of survivors who had heeded the calls of other messengers is not known, the people of Moses worshipped a calf and were punished by Allāh (20:88, etc.).

Moses was in this case clearly the leader of the Israelites, but the Qur'ān does not state that he possessed kingship. After having told his people (*qawm-h*) in verse 5:20 quoted above that prophets and kings would be appointed amongst them, he spoke as follows:

"O my Lord, I control no one (*lā amliku*) but myself and my brother, make a separation between us and the reprobate people." (5:25)

This verse is an allusion to the people who did not obey him after he had led the Israelites out of Egypt and was attempting to conquer a new land. Moses was not a king.

On the other hand, as can be seen in the following verse, the Qurʾān repeatedly states that Moses was granted the sultanate (*sultān*).

We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority (*sultān*) to Pharaoh and his nobility, but they followed the command of Pharaoh who was not right-minded. (11:96)

Like kingship (*mulk*), the sultanate too originally belonged to Allāh, but the difference between kingship and the sultanate is not clear. There is no one in the Qurʾān who was given both. The sultanate was given to Moses, but not to any other messengers. According to the Qurʾān, Muḥammad never sought kingship from Allāh, nor was it bestowed on him. But in the following verse he respectfully asks for the sultanate:

And say: "O my Lord, give me a proper entrance and a proper outgoing, and appoint for me from thy side such authority (*sultān*) as will aid me."
(17:80)

This verse would seem to be related to the occasion when Allāh reprimanded Muḥammad for his attempt to reach a compromise with the people of Mecca. Here *sultān* would seem to refer to good judgement rather than the authority to rule. At a later date, when how to respond to the Hypocrites became an issue, Allāh gave the following verse to Muḥammad:

If they (the Hypocrites) do not withdraw from you, and (do not) offer you peace, and restrain their hands, take them and kill them wherever ye come upon them; against them We give you clear authority (*sultān*).
(4:91)

Here *sultān* would seem to signify the authority to decide whether or not to fight the Hypocrites. Muḥammad was following in the footsteps of Moses, his precursor as messenger.

7. *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*

About seventy believers accompanied Muḥammad on the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, and in the *ḥadīth* they are called the *muhājirūn*. Meanwhile, the believers who accepted Muḥammad in Medina are called the *anṣār*. At the time of the battle of Badr they numbered only about three hundred. In the entire Qurʾān it is only in the following two verses that the *muhājirūn* and *anṣār* are mentioned together:

Those who have precedence are the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār*, and those who have followed them in well-doing. Allāh is satisfied with them and they are satisfied with Him. (9:100)

Allāh hath relented towards the prophet and the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār* who followed him in the hour of difficulty after the hearts of some of them had nearly swerved aside. (9:117)

Bell considers these two verses to be fragments unrelated to the surrounding verses, and he identifies them as “fairly early Medinan.” But this view is unconvincing. Assuming that they are both connected to the surrounding verses, it is clear that verse 9:100 dates from the time of the pact of al-Ḥudaybiya six years after the *hijra*, while verse 9:117 concerns the expedition to Tabūk nine years after the *hijra*, and so they are both quite late. It is to be surmised that in verses from Bell's Qurʾān period the terms *muhājirūn* and *anṣār* had not yet taken root. Let us consider, for example, a verse alluding to the *émigrés*.

Those who have emigrated (*alladhīna hājarū*) have been expelled from their dwellings, have suffered annoyance in My cause, have fought and been killed — from them I shall expiate their evil deeds, and cause them to enter Gardens through which the rivers flow. (3:195)

As can be seen in this verse, the expression “those who have emigrated” is used more frequently than *muhājirūn* during the early stages of Muḥammad's Medinan period. Other examples include “those who have emigrated in the matter of Allāh after having been wronged” (16:41) and “those who have emigrated after having been tried and who then have striven and endured” (16:110).

In verses such as these Allāh promises good things to “those who have emigrated,” but there is no mention of the believers in Medina. The verses preceding verse 16:110 clearly refer to the nonbelievers in Mecca, and verse 16:112 which comes immediately after, also alludes to Mecca:

Allāh hath coined a comparison — a town which was secure and at peace, to which its provision came comfortably from every place, which then showed itself unthankful for the good gifts of Allāh.

Bell seems to consider verse 16:110 to be unrelated to the surrounding verses, but it would seem safe to say that these verses constitute a single group. For a time after the *hijra* Muḥammad still saw himself as a messenger who had been sent to Mecca, and he would not have had such a great interest in Medinan society from a religious point of view.

8. Jews and Christians

By the time we come to Bell's third period, Muḥammad had increased his knowledge of Judaism and Christianity through his debates with the Medinan Jews. He had become convinced that he was not only a messenger and a warn-er, but also a prophet, as can be inferred from the following verse:

O prophet (Muḥammad), We have sent thee as a witness, a bringer of good tidings (*mubashshir*), and a warner. (33:45)

He also believed that Allāh's sending of him had already been foretold in the Bible:

Who follow the messenger, the native prophet (*al-nabi' al-ummi*), whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Evangel in their possession, ... (7:157)

Muḥammad believed that Allāh had conferred the Torah (*al-Tawrā*) on Moses and the Evangel (*al-Injīr*) on Jesus. In the Qurʾān, the following words are attributed to Jesus:

And when Jesus, son of Mary, said: "O Children of Israel, I am Allāh's messenger to you, confirming the Torah which was before me, and announcing the good tidings of a messenger who will come after me, bearing the name Aḥmad." (61:6)

Aḥmad is none other than Muḥammad. Jesus was sent in order to confirm the Torah that had been given to Moses, while Aḥmad – that is, Muḥammad – was sent to confirm the Torah and the Evangel.

During this period Muḥammad was both a messenger and a prophet. But it would not appear that all messengers were also prophets.

Verily We have made suggestions to thee as We made suggestions to Noah and the prophets after him; and We made suggestions to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Patriarchs, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms, (4:163) and messengers whom We have already recounted to you and messengers whom We have not recounted; to Moses (indeed) Allāh spoke directly. (4:164)

The prophets listed in verse 4:163 all figure in the Bible, while the "messengers whom We have already recounted to you" in verse 4:164 probably refer

to Hūd sent to ʿĀd, Ṣāliḥ sent to Thamūd, Shuʿaib sent to Midian, and so on. Though these latter may have been messengers, they are never referred to as prophets in the Qurʾān. Muhammad would seem to have avoided referring to messengers not appearing in the Bible as prophets. But he also believed that he himself was a prophet following in the footsteps of Moses and Jesus, and he considered that he too was being bestowed a Book (*al-kitāb*) comparable to the Torah of Moses and the Evangel of Jesus. He gained this perception during Bell's third period, and it would seem that he felt vaguely that, rather than being a messenger sent to a specific city, he had been sent to all of humankind.

Although Muhammad did not lose his interest in groups of people who had been destroyed in the past, during this period his interest seems to have centred on the existence of the Jews and the Christians, who possessed books in the form of the Torah and the Evangel. Contemporary Judaism may be considered to have been a unified religion, whereas Christianity was divided into several sects that differed in their understanding of, for instance, Jesus and Mary. Muhammad himself came to aspire to the establishment of a third form of monotheism. Why was it that believers were disunited?

The people were only one community (*umma*), but they went different ways, and had it not been for a word from thy Lord which preceded, decision would certainly have been given between them in regard to that in which they differ. (10:19)

Humanity was disunited because of differences in its interpretation of "a word" given to the people by Allāh before the time of Muhammad.

The people were one community; then Allāh raised up the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners, and with them He sent down the Book with the truth to judge amongst the people regarding that in which they had differed; it was only those to whom it had been given who differed in regard to it after the Evidences had come to them, because of jealousy amongst themselves. (2:213)

Although a succession of prophets had been sent, the differences in people's views failed to be resolved and they remained disunited. In verses 5:46-47 it is stated that Christians should be judged by the Evangel given to Jesus, and in the next verse Muhammad is told to judge in accordance with the Book that had been given to him. This is followed by this statement:

Had Allāh so willed, He would have made you one community, but (He hath not done so) in order that He might try you in regard to what has come to you. (5:58)

Here "you" refers to people in general. Allāh was testing the believers who followed the Torah, the believers who followed the Evangel, and the believers who followed the Book given to Muḥammad. "Among these believers, the best are the last community of believers" (3:110).

9. Abraham and Mecca

In what Bell calls the third period, Muḥammad attached great importance to Abraham, who was a forebear of Moses and Jesus.

O People of the Book, why do ye dispute about Abraham, seeing that the Torah and the Evangel were not sent down till after his time? Have ye no sense? (3:65)

It is true that, according to the Bible, Abraham predated the compilation of the Torah and the Evangel. Therefore, he was neither a Jew nor a Christian.

Abraham was not a Jew, nor was he a Christian, but he was a *ḥanīf*, a Muslim, and he was not one of the Polytheists. (3:67)

Furthermore, it was neither Judaism nor Christianity, but Abraham's faith that served as a model for Muḥammad.

Surely, the people who are nearest to Abraham are those who followed him, and this prophet and those who have believed. (3:68)

"This prophet" was none other than Muḥammad, and in his view Abraham had associations with Mecca.

When We appointed the House (Ka'ba) to be a place of resort and a security for the people, and: "Take for yourselves the station of Abraham as a place of prayer," and We covenanted with Abraham and Ishmael: "Purify My House for those who circle round it, and for those who cleave to it, and for those who bow and prostrate themselves." (2:125)

As in the case of Abraham, Mecca came to occupy a central position in the beliefs of Muḥammad, who aspired to the establishment of a third form of monotheism. Unlike other cities that had in the past refused to accept Allāh's messengers, Mecca could no longer be allowed to be destroyed.

10. Muḥammad as a Political and Military Leader

In Medina, Muḥammad was the leader of the believers, and he anticipated that both he and his believers would have to fight. This is evident from a verse thought to have been revealed after the battle of Badr.

O thou prophet, stir up the believers to fight: "If there be twenty of you who endure, they will overcome two hundred, and if there be a hundred of you, they will overcome a thousand of those who have disbelieved, because they are a people of no intelligence." (8:65)

Muḥammad recognized that prophets before him had also fought:

How many a prophet (has there been) along with whom many thousands fought, and did not grow faint because of what befell them in the way of Allāh, nor did they weaken or humble themselves! — Allāh loveth those who endure. (3:146)

Muḥammad, a fighting prophet, demanded of his believers that they follow his decisions. A verse from after the battle of Badr reads as follows:

They ask thee about the windfalls (spoils); say: "The windfalls belong to Allāh and the messenger; so show piety towards Allāh, and set right what is between you; obey Allāh and His messenger, if ye be believers." (8:1)

The word here translated as "obey" is *atʿū*. Meanwhile, the word translated as "follow" in the phrase "Who follow the messenger, the native prophet" in verse 7:157 quoted earlier is form VIII of the verb *tabaʿa*, meaning "to follow a precedent" or "to follow after," and it does not have any sense of "accepting a political decision." In contrast, forms I and IV of *tāʿa* as used in the Qurʾān would seem to imply political submission. Moreover, the people to whom submission was tendered were always messengers and never prophets. The messengers Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot and Shuʿaib listed in verses 26:105 *infra* ordered their people to obey them. For instance, in the case of Noah, he said:

Lo, I am to you a messenger faithful; so, show piety towards Allāh, and obey me. (26:108)

Muḥammad considered that a messenger had the authority to command people to obey him. But the verses of the Qurʾān do not indicate that a prophet had any such power. It would seem that Muḥammad recognized a subtle differ-

ence between messengers and prophets.

After the battle of Badr, Muḥammad continued fighting and made many political decisions, and numerous verses in the Qurʾān call on believers to submit to his instructions and decisions, with many of them taking the form “obey Allāh and His messenger.” The following verse was also revealed:

O ye who have believed, obey Allāh and obey the messenger and those of you who have the command (*aṭīʿū al-rasūl wa ūlī al-amri min-kum*), and if ye quarrel about anything, refer it to Allāh and the messenger, if you have come to believe in Allāh and the Last Day. (4:59)

In this manner Muḥammad acquired the power to decide on all matters, including what we would today describe as civil and criminal affairs. In addition, he was able to appoint people to whom he could transfer his authority.

Among the believers who ought to have obeyed him, there were some who refused to do so, and in the Qurʾān they are called “hypocrites” (*munāfiqūn*). At the battle of Uḥud a group of people left Muḥammad’s camp, and as a result the battle turned out unfavourably for Muḥammad. In this connection we find the following verse:

What befell you on the day when the two hosts met was by the permission of Allāh, and in order that He might know the believers and in order that He might know those who played the hypocrite. (3:166)

Allāh sometimes ordered Muḥammad to fight Hypocrites (9:73, etc.), but on occasion they were also pardoned by Allāh if they returned to their faith (4:145-146). Furthermore, as was noted earlier, Allāh granted Muḥammad the sultanate (*sulṭān*) over the Hypocrites.

From about five years after the *hijra*, the world of Muḥammad and his believers began to spread beyond Medina. But there were still Medinans who did not submit to Muḥammad. In verses relating to those who refused to participate in the expedition to Tabūk nine years after the *hijra*, it is stated that those who stay at home without fighting even though they live in Medina are not treated by Allāh on a level with those who fight, and they are also criticized by angels, who will say, “But was not the land of Allāh wide so that ye might have migrated in it?” (4:95-96) Criticism was also levelled against the nomads who refused to fight or bear some of the expenses. An example of this can be seen in the following verse:

The Bedouin (*al-aʿrāb*) say: “We have believed.” Say: “Ye have not believed, but say ye rather, ‘We have become Muslims’; for belief has not yet entered your hearts.” (49:14)

Until his death Muhammad continued to criticize those who would not submit to him.

For Muhammad during Bell's third period, those who believed the Book that had been given to him were "his people." Such people were neither Jews nor Christians, but true believers, and Muhammad became a political and military leader who demanded of them that they obey him in his capacity as a messenger. But among those who, in his view, ought to have obeyed him, there were some who refused to do so to the very end.

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