



“ COVENANT OF THE PROPHETS ”

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The Holy Quran reveals:

"And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom — then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you shall believe in him and you shall aid him. He said: Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)? They said: We do affirm. He said: Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you.

Whoever then turns back after this, these are the breakers of the Covenant" (3:81:82).

According to the Holy Quran, Prophets were sent by Allah to all nations: "And for every nation there is a messenger" (10:47). "For every people there was a guide" (13:7). "And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them" (35:24).

And all these Prophets were given revealed books and naturally the same basic guidance:

"Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news [to those who believe and do good deeds] and as warners [to those who reject Divine guidance and fall into evil ways], and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed. And none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, envying one another. Therefore, Allah has [now] guided by His will those who believe to the truth about which they differed. And Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path" (2:213).

The above verse explains succinctly why the same basic guidance given to all branches of mankind led eventually to differences among nations because of their envying one another. In another place, the basic trait of man's enemy, the devil, is described as "He refused to obey because he was proud" (2:34). The same pride in human beings that follow his footsteps leads to the rejection of the Prophets and revealed books of other nations. So Divine wisdom decided to resolve those differences through the Holy Quran, which alone of all the revealed books has recognised all Prophets and religions and explained away the differences, which crept into religions through human interpolations.

Unification of Mankind:

Moreover, the division of mankind into antagonistic religions could not be allowed to go on. That is why Allah, Who sees the future turn of events, had taken the covenant from all Prophets and their peoples mentioned in the verse with which this article opens. They were to accept and join The Prophet who "will verify that which is" with each people. That Prophet was undoubtedly Muhammad (peace be upon him) who alone not only recognised all Prophets of the world and their Books, but made it obligatory on all Muslims to believe in them as much as in him and his Book. Muslims are defined in the

Holy Quran as those "who believe in that which has been revealed to thee [Muhammad] and that which was revealed before thee" (2:4). Moreover,

"The Messenger [Muhammad] believes in that which has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers" (2:285).

Could there be any doubt left as to who The Prophet was, about whom a covenant was taken from all nations, through their national prophets, that they would believe in him when he appears, his distinguishing sign being that he will "verify that which is with" them?

The verse with which this article opened also says that all prophets were required to "bear witness" about this Divine covenant. Their books are unfortunately either lost (at least the originals) or admittedly corrupted by human interpolations. However, the late Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi made a heroic and stupendous effort to collect (in his historical work "Muhammad in World Scriptures") all evidence available in the revealed books and scriptures, such as they are, to prove the universal testimony of all prophets about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Testimony of Jesus Christ:

Of all the prophets who appeared before the Holy Prophet (pbuh), the testimony of Jesus Christ is of special importance as he was the immediate predecessor, and his followers are the biggest in number in the world. Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi has therefore reproduced Jesus' testimony too. However, he has naturally relied on the four canonical gospels. These are the four gospels accepted by the Church as trustworthy. The other gospels are rejected as apocryphal (i.e., of doubtful authenticity or false). Among them is the Gospel of Barnabas which is of special interest to Muslims. However, let us first consider how the four canonical gospels came to be accepted.

When the emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity, he was bewildered to find as many as nearly three hundred gospels in vogue among the Christians. He called the leading champions of each gospel and asked them to decide which of these was correct. He put them in a hall and demanded that they decide upon the correct gospel. The holy fathers debated the issue for considerable time but could not reach an agreed conclusion. So they decided to pray to God for guidance. They put all the 300 gospels under the long table they were seated at, knelt and closed their eyes in prayer beseeching God that the correct gospel should come to the top of the table. When they opened their eyes, lo and behold there were four gospels lying on the table instead of one! The holy fathers were bewildered but seeing no way out reported the matter to the emperor. He too was disappointed, but anyhow four gospels were better than three hundred. So these four came to be approved officially and the rest were required to be surrendered to the authorities to be destroyed.

Gospel of Barnabas:

However, the Christians were flung far and wide, and the disapproved gospels remained in existence here and there. To rectify this situation, Pope Gelasius I issued an edict declaring certain books as heretical and forbade the Christians from reading them. Among them, we find the Gospel of Barnabas under its Latin name "Evangelium Barnabe". No wonder that the gospel disappeared from public view. In 478 AD the mortal remains of Barnabas were discovered, with a copy of his gospel (written in his own hand) on his

chest. Whether it was this copy or an earlier one, which found its way into the library of the Pope, it is difficult to determine.

More than a thousand years later, Fra Marino, an Italian monk, who was a friend of the then Pope Sixtus, came across this gospel in the Pope's private library and removed it quietly. He translated it into his mother tongue. This translation (or its copy) had a chequered career until it was translated in 1784 AD from Spanish into English by a professor of Queens College, Oxford. However, the Spanish and English copy both disappeared mysteriously. We hear of the gospel again in 1907 when its English translation was published by a learned theologian Ragg and his wife from the Clarendon Press, Oxford. However, even this translation became extinct mysteriously. A copy however found its way eventually to Karachi where it was published in 1974.

Why was this gospel declared heretical, then hunted down, and sought to be destroyed? A perusal brings out two main reasons:

- a. The gospel clearly denounces the concept of the divinity of Jesus, and declares him to be only a prophet of God.
- b. It contains clear prophecies about the advent, after Jesus, of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon both of them) and extols the latter's greatness.

The first reason should no longer condemn this gospel, for the present day enlightened Christian theologians (who include teachers of Christianity at famous universities of England and Europe) have themselves exploded the "Myth of God Incarnate" (see my article "Great Prophecy Fulfilled" in this paper dated May 24, 1978). The second reason requires further consideration.

It has been alleged by the critics of the Gospel of Barnabas that its author must have been a Muslim to declare so openly the advent of Muhammad by name and to extol his greatness. However, as the gospel contains intimate knowledge of the Christian and Jewish religions, it is further alleged that he was a Jew who became a Christian and then a Muslim. This allegation deserves to be dismissed summarily for the following reasons:

- a. We find mention of the Gospel of Barnabas as early as the 2nd century AD, when Iranaeus quoted extensively from it in condemning Paul for injecting into Christianity the pagan concepts prevalent in the Mediterranean littoral. Iranaeus advocated pure monotheism to be Jesus' own religion.
- b. Although this gospel was forbidden after the Council of Nicene in 325 AD, it remained in restricted use, so that Pope Gelasius I had to declare it as heretical.

This was 75 years before the Prophet Muhammad was born.

- c. Had this gospel been really written by a Muslim it should have been in circulation among the Muslims or be at least known to them. However, Muslims were completely ignorant of it until Sale mentioned it in his translation of the Holy Quran.
- d. Some of the things said in this gospel are totally opposed to the Holy Quran.

e. Barnabas, although a persona non-grata later, finds mention in the Bible (the Acts. etc.) as an active missionary of Christianity—of course of the true faith and not the heresies of Paul.

There is no reason, therefore, why the testimony of the Gospel of Barnabas about the advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad should not be considered? I reproduce below some of the prophecies contained in this gospel. It may be explained that in this gospel Jesus used the expression "Messenger of God" for the Holy Prophet Mohammad only, probably as he considered the latter to be the acme of prophet-hood, after whom no other prophet-hood will avail.

[Note: The following extracts are taken from the English translation of the Gospel by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1907) as reproduced by Islamic Publications Limited, 13-E Shah Alam Market, Lahore, Pakistan.]

Extract No. 1:

Jesus answered: "There are written in the prophets many parables, wherefore thou oughtest not to attend to the letter but to the sense. For all the prophets, that are one hundred and forty four thousand, whom God hath sent, into the world, have spoken darkly. But after me shall come the Splendour of all the prophets and holy ones, and shall shed light upon the darkness of all that the prophets have said, because he is the Messenger of God." (Page 18)

Extract No. 2:

Adam, having sprung up upon his feet, saw in the air a writing that shone like the sun, which said: "There is only one God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God". Whereupon Adam opened his mouth and said: "I thank thee, O Lord my God, that thou hast deigned to create me; but tell me, I pray Thee, what meaneth the message of these words: 'Mohammad is messenger of God'. Have there been other men before me?"

Then said God: "Be thou welcome, O my servant Adam. I tell thee that thou art the first man whom I have created. And he whom thou hast seen [mentioned] is thy son, who shall come into the world many years hence, and shall be my messenger, for whom I have created all things; who shall give light to the world when he shall come; whose soul was set in celestial splendour sixty thousand years before I made anything." (Page 50)

Extract No. 3:

Verily I say unto you, that every prophet when he is come hath borne to one nation only the mark of the mercy of God. So their words were not extended save to that people to which they were sent. But the messenger of God, when he shall come, God shall give to him as it were the seal of His hand, insomuch that he shall carry salvation and mercy to all the nations of the world that shall receive his doctrine. He shall come with power upon the ungodly, and shall destroy idolatry. (Page 56)

Extract No. 4:

I therefore say unto you that the messenger of God is a splendour that shall give gladness to nearly all that God hath made, for he is adorned with the spirit of understanding and of

counsel, the spirit of wisdom and might, the spirit of fear and love, the spirit of prudence and temperance, he is adorned with the spirit of charity and mercy, the spirit of justice and piety, the spirit of gentleness and patience, which he had received from God three times more than he hath given to all his creatures. O blessed time, when he shall come to the world! Believe me that I have seen him and have done him reverence, even as every prophet hath seen him: seeing that of his spirit God giveth to them prophecy. And when I saw him my soul was filled with consolation, saying: "O Mohammad, God be with thee, and may He make me worthy to untie thy shoe latchet, for obtaining this I shall be a great prophet and holy one of God."

And having said this, Jesus rendered his thanks to God. (Pages 58-59)

Extract No. 5:

"As for me, I am now come to the world to prepare the way for the messenger of God, who shall bring salvation to the world. However, beware that ye be not deceived, for many false prophets shall come, who shall take my words and contaminate my gospel".

Then said Andrew: "Master, tell us some sign, that we may know him."

Jesus answered: "He will not come in your time, but will come some years after you, when my gospel shall be annulled, insomuch that there shall be scarcely thirty faithful. At that time, God will have mercy on the world, and so He will send His messenger. He shall come with great power against the ungodly, and shall destroy idolatry upon the earth. Moreover, it rejoiceth me because through him our God shall be known and glorified, and I shall be known to be true; and he will execute vengeance against those who shall say that I am more than man. Verily I say to you that the moon shall minister sleep to him in his boyhood, and when he shall be grown up he shall take her in his hands. Let the world beware of casting him out because he shall slay the idolaters, for many more were slain by Moses, the servant of God, and Joshua, who spared not the cities which they burnt, and slew the children; for to an old wound one applieth fire.

He shall come with truth more clear than that of all the prophets, and shall reprove him who useth the world amiss." (Pages 91-92)

Extract No. 6:

But when God shall take me away from the world, Satan will raise again this accursed sedition, by making the impious believe that I am God and son of God, whence my words and my doctrine shall be contaminated, insomuch that scarcely shall there remain thirty faithful ones: whereupon God will have mercy upon the world, and will send his messenger for whom he hath made all things; who shall come from the south with power, and shall destroy the idols with the idolaters; who shall take away the dominion from Satan which he hath over men. He shall bring with him the mercy of God for salvation of them that shall believe in him, and blessed is he who shall believe his words.

Unworthy though I am to untie his hosen, I have received grace and mercy from God to see him. (Page 122)

Extract No. 7:

The disciples answered: "O Master who shall that man be of whom thou speakest, who shall come into the world?"

Jesus answered with joy of heart: "He is Mohammed, messenger of God, and when he cometh into the world, even as the rain maketh the earth to bear fruit when for a long time it hath not rained, even so shall he be occasion of good works among men, through the abundant mercy which he shall bring." (Page 212).