

THE SATANIC VERSES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

-By Samuel Green

In 1989 the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie after Rushdie published a book entitled, *The Satanic Verses*[1]. The title of the book came from an event in Muhammad's life. This event is fully recorded and accepted as authentic by the earliest Islamic scholars: Ibn Ishaq[2], Wakidi, Ibn Sa'd[3], Tabari[4] and Bukhari[5] gives a partial account. In this article I will consult these Islamic scholars. Ibn Ishaq is the oldest account of Muhammad's life and his complete account is provided as an appendix. While this event is well documented in Islamic sources, current day Islamic leaders rarely tell Muslims or the general public about it.

The Events Surrounding the Satan Verses

While Muhammad was in Mecca his desire was that the people of Mecca, the Quraysh, would accept him as a prophet and the religion he was teaching. They were not receptive to him and made life difficult for him and his followers. Many of his followers fled to Christian Abyssinia for protection. This was until Muhammad recited Surah 53 (Surat-an-Najm) with the following verses:

Have you thought of al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third ... these are the exalted Gharaniq (a high flying bird)[6] whose intercession is approved. (Ibn Ishaq, pp. 165-166)

Al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat were some of the local idols worshiped in Mecca. Previously Muhammad had spoken against them in his monotheist preaching but now he recited that their "intercession is approved".

When Quraysh heard that, they were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods and they listened to him ... Then the people dispersed and Quraysh went out, delighted at what had been said about their gods, saying, "Muhammad has spoken of our gods in splendid fashion". (Ibn Ishaq, p. 166)

The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, repeated them (the verses), and he went on reciting the whole of surah (53) and then fell in prostration, and the people (the Quraysh) fell in prostration with him. (Ibn Sa'ad, vol. 1, p. 237)

Imam Bukhari too confirms that after Muhammad recited Sura 53 the Quraysh accepted Muhammad and prayed with him:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: The Prophet ... prostrated while reciting An-Najm (Sura 53) and with him prostrated the Muslims, the pagans (Quraysh), the jinns, and all human beings. (Bukhari: volume 2, book 19, number 177, Khan)

Muhammad's desire had been realised; the Quraysh accepted him. The Muslims who had fled to Abyssinia heard about this and many of them began to return to Mecca. The Quraysh accepted Muhammad because he had, "spoken of (their) gods in splendid fashion" (Ibn Ishaq, p. 166). The Islamic explanation as to why Muhammad accepted the idols is that he was seeking a way to attract the Quraysh and Satan used this opportunity to put these words on Muhammad's lips:

Now the apostle was anxious for the welfare of his people, wishing to attract them as far as he could. It has been mentioned that he longed for a way to attract them ... (and) Satan, when he (Muhammad) was meditating upon it, and desiring to bring it (sc. reconciliation) to his people, put upon his tongue "these are the exalted Gharaniq [6] whose intercession is approved". (Ibn Ishaq, pp. 165-166)

This is what is meant by the phrase, the Satanic Verses; they were words that Muhammad spoke from Satan. The Islamic accounts then say that the angel Gabriel rebuked Muhammad and held him accountable for what he had said:

Then Gabriel came to the apostle and said, "What have you done, Muhammad? You have read to these people something I did not bring you from God and you have said what He did not say to you." (Ibn Ishaq, p. 166)

Muhammad announced that Gabriel had now told him to speak against the idols and so what he recited changed. Previously it had been:

Have you thought of al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third ... these are the exalted Gharaniq whose intercession is approved. (Ibn Ishaq, pp. 165-166)

Now the verse became:

Have you considered El-Lat and El-'Uzza and Manat the third, the other? What, have you males, and He females? That were indeed an unjust division. They are naught but names yourselves have named, and your fathers; God has sent down no authority touching them. (Qur'an 53:19-23, Arberry)

This final form of the verse is what is now in the modern Qur'an.

The Quraysh saw that Muhammad had now changed his message:

When the annulment of what Satan had put upon the prophet's tongue came from God, Quraysh said: "Muhammad has repented of what he said about the position of your gods with Allah, altered it and brought something else." (Ibn Ishaq, p. 166-167)

This explanation, that Satan had placed these words on Muhammad tongue and God had now cancelled it, now had to be justified to both his followers and to the Quraysh. The answer came by referring to another part of the Qur'an:

Never have We sent a single prophet or apostle before you with whose wishes Satan did not tamper. But God abrogates the interjections of Satan and confirms His own revelations. (Qur'an 22:52, Dawood)

Muhammad's justification was that other prophets had had their wishes tampered with by Satan just as he had done, but God had corrected the whole situation.

Some Implications of the Satanic verses

Such an event as Muhammad speaking the words of Satan and momentarily accepting idolatry and polytheism demand some comment. I have six observations.

1. It is a real event that must be considered.

It is Ibn Ishaq, Wakidi, Ibn Sa'd, Tabari and Bukhari who recorded and accepted the details of this event. If this story was told by people opposed to Islam then it would be fair to question whether they had invented this story as a way of discrediting Muhammad. But it is inconceivable that Ibn Ishaq, Wakidi, Ibn Sa'd, Tabari and Bukhari would invent a story about Muhammad accepting idols. It is shameful that the modern accounts of Muhammad's life do not include or deal adequately with this event.

The Qur'an says that other prophets also sinned this way (Adam 7:189-192 and Aaron 4:163, 7:150-153, all prophets 22:52), therefore, it cannot be argued, from the Qur'an, that a prophet would be incapable of doing this because the Qur'an clearly says that other prophets did it.

2. It is an example of abrogation.

The event of the Satanic Verses shows how a verse in the Qur'an could be modified or deleted at a later date. This is an example of the Qur'anic doctrine of abrogation. The hadith also records several other occasions where verses of the Qur'an were modified, changed or deleted.

Narrated Al-Bara: There was revealed: "Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and those who strive and fight in the Cause of Allah." (Qur'an 4:95)

The Prophet said, "Call Zaid for me and let him bring the board, the inkpot and the scapula bone (or the scapula bone and the ink pot)." Then he said, "Write: Not equal are those Believers who sit ...", and at that time 'Amr bin Um Maktum, the blind man was sitting behind the Prophet. He said, "O Allah's Apostle! What is your order for me (as regards the above Verse) as I am a blind man?" So, instead of the above verse, the following verse was revealed:

"Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) except those who are disabled (by injury or are blind or lame etc.) and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah." (Qur'an 4:95) (Bukhari: volume 6, book 61, number 512, Khan, agreed)

This account clearly records the revision of 4:95 from its initial to final form. This type of modification is exactly what happened in the account of the Satanic Verses.

Here is another example:

Narrated Sahl bin Saud: When the following verses were revealed: "Eat and drink until the white thread appears to you, distinct from the black thread" (2:187) and "of dawn" was not revealed, some people who intended to fast, tied black and white threads to their legs and went on eating till they differentiated between the two. Allah then revealed the words, "of dawn", and it became clear that meant night and day. (Bukhari: volume 3, book 31, number 141, Khan)

Here is another example. In this case the verse was removed (cancelled) from the Qur'an altogether.

Narrated Anas: ... We used to recite, "Inform our people that we have met our Lord, He is pleased with us and He has made us pleased". Later on this Quranic Verse was cancelled. (Bukhari: volume 4, book 52, number 57, Khan)

Thus the Satanic Verses are not the only example of where the Qur'an was revised and modified. The modification of the Qur'an was a characteristic of how it developed. In fact, enough verses were modified or deleted that it made people doubt Muhammad was a genuine prophet and the issue had to be dealt with in the Qur'an:

And when We exchange a verse in the place of another verse - and God knows very well what he is sending down - they say (to Muhammad), "Thou art a mere forger!" (Qur'an 16:101, Arberry)

This modification and deleting of verses also makes me doubt that Muhammad was a genuine prophet. Why would God need to modify, change or delete his word? Surely God would get it right the first time? The fact that Muhammad had to change what he recited shows that he spoke from himself and not God. The whole doctrine of abrogation[7] is just an excuse used by Muhammad to justify the fact that he changed what he recited to suit his situation.

It also exposes as false the claims that Muslim leaders make about the Qur'an. They claim the Qur'an came straight from Gabriel to Muhammad, and Muhammad memorized it with his followers and that it was never edited:

The text of the Qur'an is entirely reliable. It has been as it is, **unaltered, unedited**, not tampered with in any way, since the time of its revelation. (M.Fethullah Gulen, *Questions this Modern Age Puts to Islam*, London: Truostar, 1993. p. 58)

However, as all the evidence we have seen shows, the Qur'an was edited and revised.

3. Satan produced a *sura* like it.

One of the proofs that Islamic leaders give that the Qur'an is miraculous is that no one is able to produce a *sura* like it. This challenge is found in the Qur'an itself:

And if you are in doubt concerning that We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a *sura* like it. (Qur'an 2:23, Arberry)

They say the Qur'an is miraculous in beauty and no one can make anything to compare to it. However, the event of the Satanic Verses casts doubt over this claim. For in this event Muhammad spoke words from Satan but everyone thought these verses were part of the Qur'an for

the believers were holding that what their prophet brought from their Lord was true, not suspecting a mistake or a vain desire or slip. (Ibn Ishaq, pp. 166)

Thus the Islamic sources record that Satan produced verses which sounded exactly like those of the Qur'an. If they did not sound like the Qur'an then surely Muhammad, his followers and the Quraysh would never have accepted them?

4. Muhammad committed a serious sin.

Accepting idolatry and polytheism is sin, and for a short period of time, while he was claiming to be a prophet, Muhammad did this. It is true that Muhammad repented and this is to his credit, but this event still shows a great failing in his life. This event must not be ignored because it is inconvenient or thought irrelevant, for it shows that Muhammad was like you and me; he had to confess his sins and ask for forgiveness:

(Muhammad prayed) O Allah! Forgive my mistakes and my ignorance and my exceeding the limit (boundaries) of righteousness in my deeds; and forgive whatever You know better than I. O Allah! Forgive the wrong I have done jokingly or seriously, and forgive my accidental and intentional errors, all that is present in me. (Bukhari: volume 8, book 75, number 408, Khan)

So know (O Muhammad) that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and women (Qur'an 47:19, Pickthall)

5. Jesus and Muhammad

Muhammad was tempted to acknowledge false gods in order to achieve his desire of the Quraysh accepting him. He gave in to this temptation and acknowledged their gods. Jesus too was tempted to achieve his desire to rule as Christ by acknowledging false gods, but when Satan tempted Jesus,

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:10, NIV)

Jesus was tempted by Satan in exactly the same way that Muhammad was, but unlike Muhammad Jesus never sinned. Jesus succeeded where Muhammad failed. How different Jesus is to Muhammad!

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22, NIV).

(He) has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15, NIV).

Jesus is the only person who has offered perfect submission to God. He is greater than Muhammad.

6. It is an example of how Muhammad's desires inspired the Qur'an.

In all of the Islamic accounts of the Satanic Verses the account begins with Muhammad's desire to see the Quraysh accept him as a prophet:

Now the apostle was anxious for the welfare of his people, wishing to attract them as far as he could. ... he meditated on the project and longed for it and it was dear to him. (Ishaq, p. 165)

He was one day sitting alone when he expressed a desire: I wish, Allah had not revealed to me anything distasteful to them. (Ibn Sa'ad, p. 237)

The Messenger of God was eager for the welfare of his people and wished to effect a reconciliation with them in whatever ways he could. ... he longed in his soul that something would come to him from God which would reconcile him with his tribe. ... and he debated with himself and fervently desired such and outcome. (Tabari, pp. 107-108)

From this starting point the rest of the events of the Satanic Verses occur. However there are other examples of where Muhammad's desire, and that of his companions, led to "revelations" from Allah. Consider these four examples.

1. The Direction of Islamic Prayer

Here we see that originally Muhammad prayed facing Jerusalem, but he wished for the direction to be change. Then he received a "revelation" from Allah (Qur'an 2:144) saying to now pray facing Mecca.

Narrated Al-Bara: The Prophet prayed facing Bait-ul-Maqdis (i.e. Jerusalem) for sixteen or seventeen months but he wished that his Qibla would be the Ka'ba (at Mecca). (So Allah Revealed (2.144) and he offered 'Asr prayers (in his Mosque facing Ka'ba at Mecca) and some people prayed with him. ... (Bukhari: volume 6, book 60, number 13, Khan)

2. When Allah Agreed with Umar

Here are three occasions when the desires and sometimes exact words of Umar, Muhammad's companion, became revelations from Allah.

Narrated 'Umar (bin Al-Khattab): My Lord agreed with me in three things:

1. I said, "O Allah's Apostle, I wish we took the station of Abraham as our praying place (for some of our prayers). So came the Divine Inspiration: And take you (people) the station of Abraham as a place of prayer (for some of your prayers e.g. two Rakat of Tawaf of Ka'ba)". (Qur'an 2:125)

2. And as regards the (verse of) the veiling of the women, I said, "O Allah's Apostle! I wish you ordered your wives to cover themselves from the men because good and bad ones talk to them." So the verse of the veiling of the women was revealed. (Qur'an 24:31)

3. Once the wives of the Prophet made a united front against the Prophet and I said to them, "It may be if he (the Prophet) divorced you, (all) that his Lord (Allah) will give him instead of you wives better than you." So this verse (the same as I had said) was revealed." (Qur'an 66:5). (Bukhari: volume 1, book 8, number 395, Khan)

3. Muhammad's Sexual Privileges

In Sura 33 we read of Muhammad's sexual privileges.

Prophet, We have made lawful to you the wives to whom you have granted dowries and the slave-girls whom Allah had given you as booty; the daughters of your paternal and maternal uncles and of your paternal and maternal aunts who fled with you; and any believing woman who gives herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to take in marriage. **The privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believer.** (Qur'an 33:50, Dawood)

The astonishing thing about this revelation is that Muhammad is given unique sexual privileges that no other Muslim was to have! This is normally the type of behaviour we associate with a cult leader. This privilege is seen in the next verse too, for Muhammad had many wives and there was an agreed roster by which he was shared among them. But in 33:51 Muhammad is given a special revelation so that he does not have to fulfil his sexual duties to his wives according to this roster. It is very interesting to read Aisha's response to this revelation:

Narrated Aisha: ... (W)hen Allah revealed: "You (O Muhammad) can postpone (the turn of) whom you will of them (your wives), and you may receive any of them whom you will; and there is no blame on you if you invite one whose turn you have set aside (temporarily)." (Quran 33:51) I said (to the Prophet), "**I feel that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your wishes and desires.**" (Bukhari: volume 6, book 60, number 311, Khan)

4. Muhammad Taking Zaynab as His Wife

Muhammad had an adopted son named Zayd. Zayd had a beautiful wife named Zaynab. Now consider the following:

One day the Messenger of God went out looking for Zayd. Now there was a covering of haircloth over the doorway, but the wind had lifted the covering so that the doorway was uncovered. Zaynab was in her chamber, undressed, and admiration for her entered the heart of the Prophet. (al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 8, "The Victory of Islam" (Trans. Michael Fishbein) Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 4)

Here we see Muhammad visit Zayd's house and he sees Zayd's wife "undressed". We are told that, "admiration for her entered (his) heart". Muhammad's desires were obvious to Zayd and so Zayd offered to divorce Zaynab so that Muhammad could have her. Initially Muhammad refused as it was considered shameful in the pre-Islamic culture, as it is in many cultures, to marry your daughter-in-law. But then Muhammad received this revelation:

Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him; ... nor has He made those whom you assert to be your sons your real sons; these are the words of your mouths; and Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way. (Qur'an 33:4, Shakir)

This revelation is saying that adopted sons are not to be considered real sons. Thus Zayd was not a son of Muhammad. This now justified Muhammad taking Zaynab as his wife. And this is what is "revealed" in verse 37.

... But when Zayd had accomplished his want of her (Zaynab), We gave her to you (Muhammad) as a wife ... (Qur'an 33:37, Shakir)

Thus, what began with the desires Muhammad had when he saw Zaynab undressed, ended with revelations from Allah annulling adoption and the giving of Zaynab to Muhammad. This example, and the others I have given in this section, and the event of the Satanic Verses, convince me that Muhammad prophesied from his own desires and this is why I do not accept him as a prophet.

Appendix: Ibn Ishaq's account of the Satanic Verses.

Now the apostle was anxious for the welfare of his people, wishing to attract them as far as he could. It has been mentioned that he longed for a way to attract them, and the method he adopted is what Ibn Hamid told me that Salama said M. b. Ishaq told him from Yazid b. Ziyad of Medina from M. b. Ka'b al-Qurazi: When the apostle saw that his people turned their backs on him and he was pained by their estrangement from what he brought them from God he longed that there should come to him from God a message that would reconcile his people to him. Because of his love for his people and his anxiety over them it would delight him if the obstacle that made his task so difficult could be removed; so that he meditated on the project and longed for it and it was dear to him. Then God sent down "By the star when it sets your comrade errs not and is not deceived, he speaks not from his own desire," and when he reached

His words "Have you thought of al-Lat and al-'Uzza and Manat the third, the others"[8], Satan, when he was meditating upon it, and desiring to bring it (sc. reconciliation) to his people, put upon his tongue "these are the exalted Gharaniq[6] whose intercession is approved". When the Quraysh heard that, they were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods and they listened to him; while the believers were holding that what their prophet brought from their Lord was true, not suspecting a mistake or a vain desire or slip, and when he reached the prostration and the end of the Sura in which he prostrated himself the Muslims prostrated themselves when their prophet prostrated confirming what he brought and obeying his command, and the polytheists of Quraysh and others who were in the mosque prostrated when they heard the mention of their gods, so that everyone in the mosque believer and unbeliever prostrated, except al-Walid b. al-Mughira who was an old man who could not do so, so he took a handful of dirt from the valley and bent over it. Then the people dispersed and the Quraysh went out, delighted at what had been said about their gods, saying, "Muhammad has spoken of our gods in splendid fashion. He alleged in what he read that they are the exalted Gharaniq whose intercession is approved".

The news reached the prophet's companions who were in Abyssinia, it being reported that Quraysh had accepted Islam, so some men started to return while others remained behind. Then Gabriel came to the apostle and said, "What have you done, Muhammad? You have read to these people something I did not bring you from God and you have said what He did not say to you." The apostle was bitterly grieved and was greatly in fear of God. So God sent down (a revelation), for he was merciful to him comforting him and making light of the affair and telling him that every prophet and apostle before him desired as he desired and wanted what he wanted and Satan interjected something into his desires as he had on his tongue. So God annulled what Satan had suggested and God established His verses i.e. you are just like the prophets and apostles. Then God sent down: "We have not sent a prophet or apostle before you but when he longed Satan cast suggestions into his longing. But God will annul what Satan has suggested. Then God will establish his verses, God being knowing and wise"[9]. Thus God relieved his prophet's grief, and made him feel safe from his fears and annulled what Satan had suggested in the words used above about their gods by his revelation "Are yours the males and His the females? That were indeed an unfair division" (i.e. most unjust); "they are nothing by names which your fathers gave them" as far as the words "to whom he pleases and accepts"[10], i.e. how can the intercession of their gods avail with Him?

When the annulment of what Satan had put upon the prophet's tongue came from God, Quraysh said: "Muhammad has repented of what he said about the position of your gods with Allah, altered it and brought something else." (Ibn Ishaq, pp. 165-167)

Endnotes

[1] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, London: Viking, 1988. [2] Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, translated as, *The Life of Muhammad*, (translator: A. Guillaume), Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998. [3] Ibn Sa'ad, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, (translator: S. Moinul Haq) New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, no date. [4] Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 6, "Muhammad at Mecca" (translators: W. Montgomery Watt & M.V. McDonald), Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 107-113. [5] Bukhari: volume 2, book 19, number 177, Khan [6] Numidian cranes which fly at a great height. They were probably thought to fly near the heavens and thus be able to intercede with god(s). [7] 2:106, 16:101, 22:52 [8] Sura 53:1-20 [9] Sura 22:51/52 [10] Sura 53:19-27