



Reynolds, Gabriel Said. *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtexts*. New York: Routledge, 2010. xi + 304pp. By Kyle R. Beshears.

In recent decades, an explosion of research into Qur'ānic Studies has produced new answers to some of the most important questions concerning the origin and development of the Qur'ān. Gabriel Reynolds, Professor of Islamic Studies and Theology at the University of Notre Dame, has added an important voice to this growing chorus of new scholars willing to break from traditional modes of Qur'ānic interpretation. In *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtexts*, Reynolds parts ways with traditionalist Qur'ānic scholars content to presuppose the medieval Islamic premise that the Qur'ān must be understood, explained, and interpreted (*tafsīr*) in light of the *Sīra*, the life and teachings of Muhammad. Instead, the author argues that the Qur'ān must be read apart from Muhammad's biography and in light of earlier biblical literature, e.g. Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and early Christian commentaries. Indeed, the Qur'ān seems to expect that readers are familiar with the Bible and its related material. Separating the Qur'ān from biblical literature has only led to confusing Qur'ānic exegesis. Traditionalist scholars averse to unhitching themselves from the *Sīra* have created what Reynolds calls a crisis of Qur'ānic Studies.

How, then, ought we go about recovering from this crisis? First, we must recognize that the Qur'ān did not develop in a vacuum and does not offer a reliable chronology upon which Muhammad's biography might be constructed. In reality, the biography was developed after the formation of the Qur'ān, which itself grew in dialogue with specific interlocutors with definite cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Applying the traditionalist *tafsīr* to the Qur'ān is fictionally anachronistic; something akin to reading George Washington's childhood journal with

the cherry tree in mind. Second, we must also recognize that any fruitful reading of the Qur'ān must consider its biblical subtexts. Reynolds offers his readers examples of these subtexts by exploring thirteen case studies, such as; the prostration of angels before Adam (39), the fall of Satan (54), the clothing of Adam due to shame (64), the ministry of Jonah (117), the nativity of Mary (130), and the ancient Christian tradition of the Seven Youths of Ephesus (167).

These case studies represent the bulk of the book (39–199). They leave little room to dismiss Reynold's argument while simultaneously showcasing his prowess as a Qur'ānic scholar. However, an objection from a traditionalist perspective might arise, for Reynolds' case studies do not include any direct imports from the Bible, i.e., the Qur'ān does not quote the Bible word-for-word. How, then, can the Qur'ān be influenced by the Bible if the latter does not appear directly in the former? Reynolds does not allow this objection to go unchallenged. He laboriously reveals numerous allusions or references to biblical content and stories that greatly influenced the Qur'ān. So, while the Bible is not directly imported into the Qur'ān, it is beyond doubt that biblical literature played a major role in its development.

In what is perhaps the most beneficial aspect of *Biblical Subtexts*, Reynolds convincingly demonstrates that recognizing the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Bible offers a clear guide through the Qur'ān's hazy chronology (206). Confusing passages dissolve and give way to clarity when biblical texts are given their due consideration. Reynolds notes how, without the Bible, interpreters throughout history have read into the Qur'ān their particular concerns (e.g., haggadist exegesis, rationalism, atomism, literalism, fundamentalism, etc.) and were affected by their own contextual influencers (228). Consequently, turning the clock back further in time does not yield a clearer interpretation. What came *before* the Qur'ān (biblical texts), not what came *after* (the *Sīra*), unlocks its mysteries.

In all, Reynolds has presented a convincing thesis that will help shape the future dialogue between traditionalist and new schools of Qur'ānic Studies. This book is an essential read for any student of the Qur'ān and Islamic Studies. It is important even to Biblical Studies, in that the Qur'ān has become—or, better, always has been—a significant dialogue partner with biblical literature. Studying the Qur'ān in light of its biblical subtexts promises to yield key insight into historical biblical exegesis and the Bible's reception during early Islamic expansion.

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