

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

SEVERE REBUKE OF IDOLATRY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND GOD'S JEALOUSY

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The Quran vehemently condemns the association of any form of partnership with God. Furthermore, the Quran advances various forms of idolatry and does not restrict it to the worship of physical objects such as statues.

Other forms of idolatry from a Quranic perspective are:

- (1) One's own ego and desire as an idol (25:43)
- (2) Intercessors as idols (10:18)
- (3) Worship of dead saints and prophets as idolatry (16:20-21, 18:102, 17:56-67, 3:79-80, 39:3, 7:194)
- (4) Taking Jinns as idols (6:100)
- (5) Property, goods and assets as idols (18:34, 18:42-43)
- (6) Holding other sources other than what is revealed as idols (6:19, 68:36-38)
- (7) Religious leaders, scholars and revered personalities as idols (9:31)

However, little known to most believers and possibly to many Old Testament readers, is the vitriolic Hebrew language used to condemn idolatry in the Bible. Let us consult the following passage. For those not familiar with Hebrew, I have highlighted and elucidated a key term.

Exodus 34:15 (KJV)

Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go **a whoring** after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice

טו פֶּן-תִּכְרַת בְּרִית, לְיוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ: וְזָנּוּ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, וַיִּבְחֹוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם, וַקָּרָא לָד, וְאָכְלָתָּ מִזִּבְחֹו.

zanah

Source [1] - Illustration - Joseph Islam

Exodus 34:16 (KJV)

And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a **whoring** after their gods, and make thy sons go a **whoring** after their gods.

Exodus 34:17 (KJV)

Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.

Many Arabic speakers will be aware of the Arabic word 'zina' as used in verse 24:2 of the Quran to denote illicit sexual relations, whether fornication or adultery. Similarly, in Exodus 34:15-17, the Hebrew word used is 'zanah' which much like its Semitic language stock, Arabic, means to commit fornication or to play the harlot.

THE OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW LEXICON

Zanah

to commit fornication, be a harlot, play the harlot

(Qal)

1. to be a harlot, act as a harlot, commit fornication
2. to commit adultery
3. to be a cult prostitute
4. to be unfaithful (to God) (fig.)

(Pual) to play the harlot

(Hiphil)

1. to cause to commit adultery
2. to force into prostitution
3. to commit fornication [2]

STRONG'S CONCORDANCE

zanah: to commit fornication, be a harlot

Original Word: זָנָה

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: zannah

Phonetic Spelling: (zaw-naw')

Short Definition: harlot [3]

NAS EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE

Word Origin: a prim. root

Definition: to commit fornication, be a harlot

NASB Word Usage

adulterous (1), become a harlot (1), commit adultery (1), commits flagrant harlotry (1), fall to harlotry (1), harlot (22), harlot continually (1), harlot's (2), harlot's* (2), harlot* (3), harlotry (3), harlots (5), making her a harlot (1), play the harlot (18), play the harlot continually (1), played the harlot (24), playing the harlot (3), plays the harlot (1), prostitute (1), unfaithful (1). [4]

The rebuke of idolatry in the Old Testament is so severe that it is likened to spiritual prostitution.

Indeed, the Old Testament dealt with a certain people and their tendencies and as such, language constituted a befitting response to the nature of the repeated transgressions. However, the analogy of idolatry with spiritual prostitution is significant. It hints at a strong inclination to sin, an impudent error of judgment, one associated with wanton behaviour.

The Quran also uses strong language to condemn idolatry such as 'rijs' (22:30) which not only is a reference to a disease of the camel in which it trembles and convulses, it also implies plague, pestilence, an impurity, filth and uncleanness.

GOD IS NOT JEALOUS

Despite the emotive language used, Exodus 34:15-17 above can be better understood in terms of moral and spiritual degradation likened to prostitution.

However, the preceding verse of the Old Testament (Exodus 34:14) is difficult to reconcile and remains **inconsistent** with the Quran's depiction of God, who requires no need to be '**jealous**'.

Exodus 34:14 (KJV)

For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God

Quite apart from the Quran's assertion that **all beautiful names** belong to God (17:110, 7:180), the Old Testament Hebrew word to name and describe God is "qanna (kan-naw)" which means **jealous**.

This term has been used in other Biblical passages such as Numbers 5:14 to depict human jealousy between spouses.

According to the Quran, God is Omnipotent and is not in any need of His servants or their worship. It is His servants that need Him. Therefore, He has absolutely **no requirement** to be jealous.

In contrast to the Biblical passage, the Quran provides a truthful depiction of what Prophet Moses^(pbuh) actually expressed which provides a completely different depiction of God to that advanced by Exodus 34:14.

014.008

"And Moses said: "If you disbelieve, you and whoever (is) in the earth together, then indeed, God is Self-sufficient (Free of need), Praiseworthy"

This is further supported by other Quranic passages:

039.007 (part)

"If you disbelieve, then surely God is Self-sufficient above all need of you; ; but He likes not ingratitude from His servants: if you are grateful, He likes it in you..."

003:097 (part)

"...and whoever disbelieved then indeed, God stands not in need of any of His creatures"

The accusation of human intervention of Biblical scriptures seems to be somewhat supported when one considers such aberrations above, which depict God as 'jealous' which is against His true nature. This is consistent with the Quranic expression which insinuates an imperceptibility / suppression in meaning or content of Biblical narratives over the passage of time.

005:015

"O People of the Book, surely there has come to you our Messenger, making clear to you much of what you used to conceal (**Arabic: tukh'funa**) of the scripture and **overlooking / forgiving much (Arabic: wa-ya'fu an kathiran)**. Surely has come to you from God a light and a clear book"

The Arabic word 'tukh'funa' comes from the root **KHA-FA-YA** which carries the meaning of what is unapparent / has become imperceptible / has become dim to the sight / or suppressed, or obscured to the mind. It also carries the meaning of something which has become 'concealed'.

Therefore, the Quran within context of its Arabic usage clearly recognised that certain aspects of the previous scriptures had become gradually concealed and deemed it fit to expound on some of them. It was also not the intention of the Quran to deal with each and every narrative of the Bible hence the term '**wa-yafu an kathiran**' (forgive, pardon, pass over, relinquish or remit a whole or part or indeed pardon much).

The Quran remains the final source to judge the Bible passages and a guard.

005.048 (part)

"To thee We revealed the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that is between the hands

(coexistent Torah and Bible), and guarding it by determining what is true and false (Arabic: wamuhayminan)..."

FINAL THOUGHTS

From a Quranic perspective, idolatry of all forms is strongly condemned. Albeit many only see idolatry as statue worship, from a Quran's perspective, it has a much broader purport and needs to be understood properly and countered. Similarly, the Bible also uses powerful language to condemn idolatry which provide some overlap with the sentiments advanced by the Quran.

However, the concept of God as 'jealous' is **incompatible** with the Quranic concept of God. **God remains free of all wants.**

Believers should study Biblical passages allowing for discernment through the **lens of the Quran**. This remains rather different from 'picking and choosing'. Whereas the latter implies subjective criteria, the discernment in light of the Quran allows for discernment **based on Divine guidance** given by the final scripture to mankind (the Quran).

Related Article:

- (1) [Idolatry According to the Quran](#)
- (2) ['Between his Hands' or 'Before It' \(Ma Bayna Yadayhi\)](#)

REFERENCES

[1] MECHON MAMRE, Available at [online] <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0234.htm> [Accessed] 5th April 2012]

Highlights marked in red and black are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] STUDYLIGHT.ORG, Copyright Statement: The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon is Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Lexicon; this is keyed to the "Theological Word Book of the Old Testament." These files are considered public domain. Bibliography Information Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Zanah". "The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon" Available at [online] <http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=02181> [Accessed] 4th April 2012

[3] STRONG'S CONCORDANCE, Available at [online] <http://concordances.org/hebrew/2181.htm> [Accessed] 4th April 2012

[4] NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries, Copyright © 1981, 1998 by The Lockman Foundation, All rights reserved Lockman.org. Available at [online] <http://concordances.org/hebrew/2181.htm> [Accessed] 4th April 2012

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