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The Rupture or Noah in the Qur'ān: A Semiotic Interpretation

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Abstract

This article provides a semiotic study of the account of Noah in Sūrat Hūd, chapter 11 of the Qur'ān. Our analysis opens with a discussion of the academic literature and the story's internal Qur'ānic context. Noah's story is said to illustrate the Qur'ānic debate of continuity and rupture in relationships between believers and unbelievers. The Qur'ān's preference for a final break with unbelievers is indicated by the flood, but the argument among believers—in reference to early Muslims—about whether to maintain ties with or reject unbelievers is crucial to the Qur'ānic story of Noah. Thus, Noah's story ends with the start of a new cycle of conflict and disagreement between the powerful and corrupt on the one hand and the truthful and upright on the other.

Keywords

Noah, loyalty, rupture, Qur'ānic ethics.

Introduction

The story of Noah is mentioned in eighteen chapters of the Qur'ān, making it a major narrative in the Qur'ānic view of prophecy. The story is only fully developed in chapter 11, verses 25–49 of the Qur'ān, which has given rise to a wealth of potent symbolic material for exegetical traditions and Arab-Muslim culture at large to appropriate and employ in a variety of ways. This story's themes—the deluge and Noah's ark, for example—abound in this culture's literary, religious, political, and social manifestations—both scholarly and popular. This influence may be seen in both Shī'ī[1] and Sunni traditions.[2]

Since its origin, Noah's Qur'ānic story has challenged Qur'ānic studies; but, with the recent research by Carlos A. Segovia and Gabriel Said Reynolds, new problems have emerged. Segovia contends that the

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[1] Khalid Sindawi, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shī'ism in Shī'ite Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 1 (2006): 29-48.

[2] Jan M. F. van Reeth, "La barque de l'Imām aš-Šāfi'ī," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. De Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 249-64.

Qur'ān presents Prophet Muḥammad as a messianic figure moulded by the apocalyptic narratives of Noah; he argues that this portrayal is essential to the formation of Islam by Muslim exegetes and Muḥammad biographers during the seventh and eighth centuries. Segovia claims that Muḥammad and the Qur'ānic Prophet were considered, at least by some of their adherents, to be messiahs in addition to prophets. So we can place Segovia's thesis on the account of Noah in the category of Messianic theses on the birth of Islam. If, from the reading of the work of Segovia, the reader comes convinced of what the Qur'ānic Prophet and Noah have in common, namely that they called their people to believe in Allah, and that they were rejected under the threat of divine punishment, no solid element on messianism was presented by Segovia.[3]

Gabriel Said Reynolds' study of the Qur'ānic account of Noah addresses the exegetical tradition and its theological theses on the prophets' infallibility on the one hand, and the story's reflection of this doctrine on the other. Reynolds also discusses the idea of the Qur'ān's prophetic pattern, which includes the calling of the prophets, rejection, and punishment. He does, however, believe that the account of Noah is ultimately only decorative and that the Qur'ān's main purpose is to remind its audience—Prophet Muḥammad—that he is where others have been before. Therefore, telling Noah's story is not its main concern. It should be mentioned that Muslim theologians and exegetes are aware of the story's brevity as it discards details about Noah's life. Instead, they interpret this story's conciseness by emphasizing the Qur'an's highlighting of the moral lesson or wisdom contained in the story, rather than the actual events. Reynolds, conversely, draws connections between the book of Ezekiel and one aspect of Noah's story—that of his unbelieving son.[4]

Unlike other approaches, ours is neither comparative nor exegetical; we propose a semiotic reading of Noah's story, reading it in its internal Qur'ānic context, and focusing on the four poles of meaning in this narrative: the context, the polemic, the flood, and the return to the present. Although it touches on some of Segovia's and Reynolds' research interests regarding the language and history of the narrative, it suggests reading this narrative more as a sign of rupture. By "sign of the

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[3] Carlos A. Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Formation in Late Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

[4] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "A Flawed Prophet? Noah in the Qur'ān and Qur'anic Commentary," in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Walid A. Saleh (Leiden, Brill, 2016), 260-73; Reynolds, "Noah's Lost Son in the Qur'ān," *Arabica* 64, no. 2 (2017): 129-48. In the same comparative vein, also see Viviane Comerro, "Un Noé coranisé," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 232, no. 4 (2015): 623-43.

rupture," we imply that there is a dispute within the Muslim community over whether or not believers should break away from their non-Muslim affiliations or remain a part of them. The Muslim community must either renounce its ancestry or make peace with the people they belonged to before the revelation, which sets the stage for this argument and provides an indisputable resolution. This is why, in our opinion, the narrative of Noah serves as support for ending relationships with infidelity rather than posing a threat to it.

Literature Review

The story of Noah has benefited from the focus of exegetes seen in both the modern Qur'ānic studies and the classical Qur'ānic commentaries. In this succinct section, we will examine some of the major thematic and analytical contributions of exegetes that elaborate on the moral and narrative importance of Noah's account. We will examine the Qur'ānic commentaries by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) as classical examples of the Sunni exegetical tradition and review the commentaries of Abū 'l-A'lā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1972) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) as cases of contemporary *tafsīr*. Furthermore, we will review some of the main academic studies on the Muslim exegesis of the story of Noah. Since the scope and goal of this section are illustrative rather than exhaustive, these examples should suffice to establish the context of our analysis.

According to al-Ṭabarī, the story of Noah depicts a conflict between the followers of monotheistic religion and those who worship idols. In the conflict between the two camps, he also points to the tenacity of Noah's opponents. Drawing on traditions and biblical passages, he offers details about Noah's journey and the deluge that heighten the dramatic quality of the narrative. Al-Ṭabarī focuses in particular on the flood's miracle, divine retribution, and its crucial role in supporting Noah and ending his struggle to spread the word about God.[5] Al-Ṭabarī's overall message appears to contend that a decisive divine punishment is required to break the disbelievers' resolve.

One of the chief Sunni exegetes and theologians, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, saw the narrative of Noah as an extended discussion between believers and nonbelievers. He disproves the arguments made by Noah's opponents, devoting the majority of his time to dialectically elaborating on Noah's claims and casting doubt on his adversaries. Al-Rāzī mainly holds that the role of the prophets is, in the end, to provide unambiguous evidence for

[5] Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy 'l-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajr li 'l-Ṭibā'ah wa 'l-Nashr, 2001), 12:377-442.

the unity of God, prophethood, and the Day of Judgement, while the disbelievers attempt to refute these ideas through falsehoods.[6]

As for the modern interpretations, for al-Mawdūdī, Noah's account demonstrates both the veracity of the Prophet and Allah's revelation to his Messenger. Al-Mawdūdī presents thought-provoking perspectives on how believers see the truth in the revelation while non-believers link it to societal standing. He argues that the rejection of truth is the root of the entire argument put forward by the nonbelievers.[7] On the other hand, Sayyid Quṭb emphasizes the story of Noah as a historical portrayal of a religiously observant community. Moreover, faith is an act that has repercussions, including the Prophet being labelled as a liar. Nevertheless, despite a disobedient son, a prophet should advocate for faith and behave appropriately since throughout history, people have opposed the idea that God is one. He continues by saying that rather than being founded on ancestry or familial relationships, Islamic society is distinct due to its foundation in faith.[8]

Apart from the scholarly works of Sindawi, van Reeth, Segovia, Reynolds, and Comerro, which have been examined in the introduction, let us assess three further academic contributions to the analysis of the Qur'ānic narrative of Noah. Giovanni Canova identifies six themes in the story of Noah found in chapter 11 (Sūrat Hūd): 1) Noah's call to his people to become believers and their refusal; 2) the building of the Ark, and the boiling oven as a sign of the impending flood; 3) Noah's summons to all believers and animal couples to board the Ark's various floors; 4) Noah's son's drowning; 5) the ceasing of the waters and the Ark's landing; and 6) Noah's prayer for forgiveness and deliverance. He thus concentrates on the story's linear development of events.[9] William M. Brinner's entry "Noah" in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* illustrates the Western scholarship's propensity to concentrate on the narrative elements of Noah in Islamic literature, particularly in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* genre, which weaves together a variety of Near Eastern, Iranian, and Indian myths and tales.[10] Finally, for Abdel Haleem, the Qur'ān only states that the prominent disbelievers and their followers drowned, obliquely downplaying the physical size of the flood and the scope of its

[6] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 17:218-44.

[7] S. Abul A'lā Maudūdī, *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, trans. Ch. Muhammad Akbar (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1967), 3:334-47.

[8] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 4:1869-93.

[9] Giovanni Canova, "The Prophet Noah in Islamic Tradition," *The Arabist* 23 (2001): 1.

[10] William M. Brinner, "Noah," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3:540-43.

destruction, and does not emphasize the punishment aspect of the Noah account. He adds that while prophets in the Qur'ān are sent to warn, they are not sent to prophesy disaster. Rather, all of the prophets in the Qur'ān were sent to advance the same core teachings. According to him, the purpose of prophetic stories is to uphold Muḥammad's prophetic status and comfort believers in their protracted fight against persecution, which they will ultimately succeed in.[11]

The Qur'ān's Internal Context

The preamble of chapter 11 (Sūrat Hūd), which tells the account of Noah in the Qur'ān, defines the status of the Qur'ān as a book whose signs were brief at first and then elaborated upon by Allah's wisdom and profound understanding of human nature, making these verses/signs sharp, *fuṣṣilat*. The early verses of this chapter (verses 1-4) ask for the restoration of Muḥammad's people to Allah under divine threat, indicating that only Allah has the power and knowledge to settle disputes. It also primes the audience for a straightforward response (i.e., worship only Allah). This passage sets the stage for the entire chapter, which is centred on a strong and unwavering trust in Allah. A number of verses regarding Allah's omniscience, omnipotence, and the diversity of humanity follow (verses 5-14). A third unit is found in the verses from verse 15 to verse 24 and recalls the divine origin of revelation and the anathema against unbelievers. These verses are followed by the account of Noah from verse 25 to verse 49. This account is the first in a series of accounts of the Prophets in this chapter. According to these stories (i.e., the narratives of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Shuʿayb, and Moses), the polytheistic peoples of these prophets attempted to bargain, to sow doubt and indecision in the camp of the believers, and ultimately suffered divine punishment. The moral of these stories is presented in verses 102–123, which bring the chapter to a close. If any cities were destroyed, it was the disbelieving citizens' fault. Conversely, the believers will receive confirmation and rewards for their faith. The Qur'ān exhorts believers to give up on doubting or making concessions to unbelievers.

This chapter of the Qur'ān asks if it is possible to worship Allah and make any kind of concession to the gods of other people. As we will see, the prophet of the Qur'ān appears to try to avoid causing trouble for his people by refraining from preaching certain revelations that might shock them. He is also concerned that he is unable to provide them with the tangible tools of persuasion that they anticipate, such as a treasure or an angelic apparition (verse 12). The Prophet is demanded in verse 17, "Do not be in

[11] M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 54-55.

any doubt about this, for it is the Truth from your Lord. But most people do not believe."[12] This chapter addresses doubts that the Muslim community has, but they have nothing to do with the nature or source of revelation. This is a community dispute about the best tactics to be used by the Muslim community to persuade its adversaries and keep ties with a group it deeply cares about; in doing so, it spares its own people. The Qur'ān seeks to resolve the issue by saying that faith cannot be bargained for, and as a result, the community must split off from its original members.

The Qur'ānic Debate between Rupture and Continuity

It is argued here that verse 24 is crucial to the chapter's organization because it both raises and answers the following question:

> The likeness of the two groups is like the blind and deaf, and the one who sees and hears: are they equal in likeness? Will you not reflect?[13]

As a result, the foundational question is rhetorical. From verse 25 to the end of the chapter, the response is less the actual response and more an example of the response to the rhetorical question previously provided. It makes sense that the rhetorical question would be directed towards the community of believers who still hold out hope for harmony and understanding with non-believers, rather than the latter group since it criticizes the mindset of communal reconciliation. The chapter's final verse presents the reader with a parable: There is no comparison or agreement between the blind and the sighted, nor between the deaf and the hearing, so we should not be misled about how different the two camps—believers and non-believers—are from one another. Neither equality nor resemblance exist. The verse serves as the prologue to the Noahic story and states unequivocally that a prophet and his non-believing people are incompatible.

The narrative of Noah starts in verse 25 as follows:

> We sent Noah to his people, saying: "I am come to you as a clear warner."[14]

In the first verse of the story of Noah, the statement "We sent Noah to his people" implies that this is another account in which Allah sends messengers to warn their people against disbelief, but these people always choose disbelief. The line "I am come to you as a clear warner" repeats the message from verse 2 of this chapter, "(Say): 'I am to you from Him a herald of glad tidings and a warner."[15] In this case, I concur

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[12] Qur'ān 11:17. All translations of the Qur'ānic verses in this article are from Tarif Khalidi, trans., *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

[13] Ibid., 11:24.

[14] Ibid., 11:25.

[15] Ibid., 11:2.

with Segovia, Reynolds, and Comerro's findings that the narratives of Noah and Prophet Muḥammad have parallels. The parallel is reaffirmed in verse 26, where the phrase "You are not to worship anything but God"[16] alludes to verse 2 "That you worship none but God."[17]

Thus, the argument between Noah and his people, which is narrated in verses 27-39, is the main focus of the Noahic account rather than the flood. The chapter's audience, who are about to accept their opponents' proposals, is indicated by the way these twelve verses set up the acrimonious exchanges between the camp of believers, represented by Noah, and the camp of non-believers, represented by the council of Noah's people. These people take on the role of questioners and attempt to sow doubt and uncertainty among the believers, while Noah responds by attempting to refute his opponents.

Discursive Voices	Thesis and Anti-Thesis	The Questions of Debate
The council of Noah's people	The following statements about Noah are made: He is mortal, the vile follow him, he is no better than the people's council, he lies (verse 27), he quarrels, he has no evidence to support his claims (verse 32), he made up his own prophecy (verse 34), and he built the ark in an absurd way (verse 38).	Can you trust those who scorn, belittle, and undermine you? Is there any justification for comparing oneself to or submitting to unbelievers?
Noah	He does not demand money or reject anyone; instead, he has received proof and kindness from God that the people's council is unable to accept. The council lacks knowledge (verses 28–30); he is merely Allah's messenger (verse 31); Allah will provide evidence, rendering the council helpless (verse 33); Noah is innocent of lying (verse 35); the council is absurd, and it will	Which is preferable, the person who accepts prophethood or the person who rejects it? Since the comparison is genuinely between Allah and the unbelievers, who are helpless in the face of almighty strength? the comparison is

[16] Ibid., 11:26.

[17] Ibid., 11:2.

	suffer agony (verse 39).	impossible
The direct divine voice	It was revealed to Noah: "None shall believe from your people except those who have already believed, so do not feel sad because of what they do" (verse 36).[18] "Build the Ark where We can see you and with Our inspiration, and do not plead with Me regarding those who are wicked. They shall be drowned" (verse 37).[19]	Can we hope that non-believers will begin to believe? Should we despair because of the actions of non-believers? The clear-cut answer is confirmed: "We must break with our people by building the ark. Can we ask Allah about the fate of non-believers?

This debate opposes a defensive respondent who wants to see his opponents modify their opinions and the aggressive and persistent questioners. Noah's stance is one of seeking reconciliation, but as the voice of God directly intervenes, it progressively turns into a quest for rupture. By relying on supernatural evidence and Allah's authority, Noah manages to tip the scales against his opponents, with the call to punishment[20] (verse 37) serving as the decisive argument that declares the victory of the believers over the unbelievers. The charge of lying made against the believers' affirmation is one particular factor that draws attention to the challenges that the believers' camp faces from their opponents. It takes only one accusation to plant doubt and mistrust in the camp of a prophet's followers, and it will be extremely difficult for the prophet to re-establish trust. Verses 35–36 of this chapter, as Mehdi Azaiez demonstrates, depict the opponents of Muḥammad who, via their denial of his message, undermine the Prophet's standing.[21] It should be noted that these verses, as well as the argument presented in this chapter more broadly, pit two "rhetorical forces" against one another: the affirmation of believers and the rejection of unbelievers.

The Flood and the Great Rupture

Even in the middle of the flood, as if to suggest that it is a secondary motivation in the Qur'ānic account of Noah, the controversy resurfaces

[18] Ibid., 11:36.

[19] Ibid., 11:37.

[20] Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 342.

[21] Mehdi Azaiez, *Le contre-discours coranique* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 141.

because the uncertainty has not entirely vanished, the community bond is hard to break, and every believer is bound by social ties with non-believers. Nevertheless, the question is not definitively settled in the passage recounting the controversy. Verse 40 of Chapter 11 starts the section about the flood, and verse 43 concludes it. The divine voice immediately steps in verse 40 to highlight the rift in the two camps' relationships that the punishment signifies:

> And so it came to pass that when Our command went out, and water gushed forth to the surface, We said: 'Load up on board two of every kind, and your family - except for those foretold - and those who believed.' But the believers with him were few.[22]

Within Noah's family, there were sceptics and non-believers, despite the flood appearing to have severed the bonds between the two groups. This verse also shows that the sheer volume of those who reject faith dominates. The debate between believers and non-believers carries on in this passage between Noah and his son (verses 41–43), despite the interruption caused by the flood. Now, the two factions' relationship reaches a turning point:

> He said: "Go on board. In the name of God may it sail and anchor! My Lord is All-Forgiving, Compassionate to each."[23]
>
> And so it sailed with them amidst waves like mountains. Noah called out to his son, who had kept away: "My son, embark with us and do not remain among the unbelievers."[24]
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> He said: "I shall find refuge on a mountain which shall protect me from the waters." He said: "Today there is no protector from the command of God, except him to whom God shows mercy." Then the waves came between them and he was among those who were drowned.[25]

The dispute between Noah and his son concludes in the same way as the discussion among Noah's people did. Noah alludes to Allah's authority, while the son concentrates on "earthly" grounds. The argument is settled by the flood's waves.

After the Flood, the Matter is Resolved, yet Unending

Verse 44 provides a concise description of the end of the flood:

[22] Qur'ān 11:40.

[23] Ibid., 11:41.

[24] Ibid., 11:42.

[25] Ibid.

> It was said: "O earth, swallow your waters! O sky, desist!" The waters subsided, the judgement was passed. The Ark settled upon Mount Judi and it was proclaimed: "Away with the wicked!"[26]

Even though this verse states that the divine order was fulfilled—a code word for the issue having been resolved and the arguments coming to an end—a third and final controversy breaks out right away, highlighting the fundamental difference between believers and non-believers once more. The dilemma resolved in this section of the story serves as a reminder to the audience of the Qur'ān, which states that the two camps cannot cohabit. This is found in verses 45–48.

> Noah then called out to his Lord, saying: "Lord, my son is of my family. Your promise is the truth, and you are the fairest of judges."[27]
>
> He said: "O Noah, he is not of your family. It is an act unrighteous. So ask Me not for that of which you have no knowledge. I counsel you not to be foolish."[28]
>
> He said: "My Lord, I seek refuge in You lest I be one who asks You for what I have no knowledge of! If You do not forgive me and show me mercy, I shall surely be lost."[29]
>
> It was said: "O Noah, disembark in Our peace, and with Our blessings upon you and upon the nations with you. Other nations We shall grant prosperity, and then there shall touch them from Us a torment most painful."[30]

Noah attempts to re-pose the question—always uncertain—of the familial and community link as an indicator of a shared fate, even though in the two preceding polemics, he is the leader of the camp of truth, as opposed to the council of his people and his son. The divine response serves as a reminder of the misunderstanding in this relationship, as unbelief creates divisions among communities. It points him in the direction of the authority of divine truth and cautions him against imitating his enemies. Subsequently, Noah concedes his loss and acknowledges the supremacy of divine wisdom and redemption via divine pardon. Man can overcome his uncertainties by learning to accept defeat, even though he may be surprised by what is within. The argument and the narrative come to an end in verse 48. Noah is blessed by Allah, Who also grants him forgiveness and permits him to set foot on earth. The verse, however, raises again the "settled" yet unending

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[26] Ibid., 11:44.

[27] Ibid., 11:45.

[28] Ibid., 11:46.

[29] Ibid., 11:47.

[30] Ibid., 11:48.

question: There is no reconciliation or shared fate between communities of believers and non-believers who are bound to punishment.

The significance of justice in the Qur'ānic account of Noah is similar to the biblical account which posits that "violence is intimately linked with injustice" as stated by André Wénin.[31] Verse 37 of the Qur'ānic story of Noah refers to Noah's people as being unjust which is the reason they were destroyed by the flood.[32] In verse 18 of this chapter, the statement "Who is more wicked than he who fabricates a lie from God? These shall be passed in review before their Lord, and the witnesses shall say: 'These are the ones who lied about their Lord - God's curse upon the wicked!'"[33] sets the stage for the account of Noah and makes it clear that the unjust will suffer Allah's punishment.[34] Verse 44 of this chapter calls the people of Noah unjust, and Noah refers to Allah as the most just judge in verse 45.[35] One distinctive feature of injustice in this chapter is that it signifies dishonesty and a lack of faith in the teachings of Noah (and by extension Muḥammad's message); injustice in this story is also equivalent to rejecting Allah and persecuting the weak. In verse 27, the people of Noah accuse him of attracting "the riff-raff" and Noah responds in verse 29 that he is not "about to drive away those who believed." The difference between the camp of believers and the camp of unbelievers is then marked by another line. While the latter make persecution of the vulnerable one of their central claims, the former do not engage in this unfair practice.

The Story's Conclusion and the Start of a New Cycle

The story concludes with a meta-narrative lesson in verse 49, which suggests the start of a new prophetic cycle. This is a cyclical history of prophets fighting for justice and truth among their people. In addition, the outcome remains the same: truth and justice win out in the face of opposition and adversity:

> These are reports of the Unseen which We reveal to you. You knew them not, neither you nor your people, beforehand. So be patient: the final outcome will vindicate the pious.[36]

This story's ending should be read in tandem with verse 120, which marks the end of the chapter and resumes the narrations with the intention of recalling and urging people to remember Allah:[37]

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[31] André Wénin, "Au-delà de la violence, quelle justice?" *Revue théologique de Louvain* 34, no. 4 (2003): 433-56.

[32] Qur'ān 11:37.

[33] Ibid., 11:18.

[34] Ibid., 11:44.

[35] Ibid., 11:45.

[36] Ibid., 11:49.

> All that We narrate to you from the tales of messengers is such wherewith We fortify your heart. To you thereby has come the Truth, a Lesson and a Remembrance to the believers.[38]

The story is primarily directed to the community of Muḥammad rather than to unbelievers; the unknown serves as a means of confirming that the only sources of assurance that can resolve disputes within the Muslim community regarding their "people" are divine knowledge and authority. However, the Qur'ān, which assures the believers of victory, calls for constancy in refusing to form an alliance with the unbelievers. This is a warning against believers who back the camp of the doves rather than a threat to the community's opponents, as Boisliveau believes. It also comes with a guarantee of victory against those who continue to reject the prophets' word.

Four Moral Meanings Displayed in Noah's Story

The first indication that appears in the Noah story found in the Qur'ān is that divine punishment serves as the strongest argument for truth. The prophets and believers who stand for truth are being persecuted by truth deniers, and as a result, divine retribution is sent to undermine the denialist camp and demonstrate that untruth cannot triumph over truth. Disasters are also indicators of the kind of evidence that cannot be refuted, and of the unbridgeable divide between truth and lies. The discourse on catastrophe found in the Qur'ān is consistent: God is the direct source of catastrophes, initiating or authorizing them to punish disbelief or to put believers to the test morally. Man's sin is the indirect cause of catastrophes. The discourse of the Qur'ān makes a distinction between two attitudes in the face of disaster: the disbelievers', who become impatient and blame their actions on others, animate or inanimate, and the believers', who show patience and moral strength. This test and its consequences for moral responsibility are failed by the majority of people because they are weak and ungrateful; they whine, rebel, and show little evidence of obeying God and His commands. In this sense, the catastrophe discourse of the Qur'ān primarily emphasizes and attributes the cause of evil to man's impatience. The Qur'ān occasionally warns rebellious people of impending catastrophe and occasionally serves as a sorrowful reminder of what happened to disbelievers in the past.

The second indication of meaning to be observed in Noah's story is that a society which is not based on faith, justice, and truth will eventually fall apart. Noah was forced to leave behind family members and his own people because they did not tolerate his opinions and discarded the links of family and ethnicity (which were supposed to protect him and his

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[37] Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*, 207.

[38] Qur'ān 11:120.

believing community). Compared to alliances and connections based on social or ethnic ties, bonds based on faith can be more enduring and morally upright. Similarly to Noah, Muḥammad was forced to break with his people in Mecca and went to Medina to build a community founded on faith. The people of Noah resemble as well the people of Mecca in rejecting faith and the persecution of the weak. Although there were strong and alluring sentiments of closeness, concern for his people, and attempts at reconciliation with Mecca among Muslims, the Qur'ānic concept of allegiance and alliance is essentially founded on faith, which comes with moral consequences such as justice and concern for the helpless; it is not a blood-related tribal alliance or loyalty intended to protect a given status quo. Thus, severing long-standing tribal ties is necessary to create a new society where justice and truth serve as the benchmarks for allegiance. Noah's flood and embarkation signified the end of his relationship with his people and the birth of a new society, whereas Muḥammad's immigration from Mecca to Medina signalled the breakup with his people and the beginning of a new world.

The story of Noah also teaches us that while the righteous escape destruction, the powerful remain unjust and haughty, and ultimately face destruction at the hands of heavenly force. The powerful show haughtiness by mocking the believers for their weakness and accusing them of having no source of power. However, they are wary of the weak because they suspect that their adherence to faith is an attempt to overthrow the system that the powerful have established. Thus, the powerful confront the weak on matters of power; they demand power as the final argument and utilize the frailty of truth-seekers to refute their arguments. The weak and believers are being used as props by the powerful and part of their contemptuous apparatus. However, the powerful lose their position of authority and are blind to the weakness in their system. Powerful people are also unfair. They wish to rule over and persecute the weak and virtuous even if they are a minority. Therefore, the flood is a means of punishment for the unforgivable sins of injustice, haughtiness, and power that are committed against the helpless. The weak righteous turn to God for blessings, serenity, good acts, and compassion. They are resilient and powerful because of these values, and they merit another chance. This story acts as a reminder to the early Islamic audience of the Qur'ān that the righteous will finally triumph against the mighty and that they must be patient in their struggle.

The narrative concludes with the idea that a prophet is a voice of justice and truth who defies corrupt authority and assumes responsibility for creating a better world. He is a truth-bearer, sent to inform the power-hungry, deceitful societies that they have gone wrong and are on the brink

of collapse. This message tries to convince the corrupt society by reasoning, but it ultimately shocks it as it has indeed lost morality, common sense, and truth awareness. A prophetic voice should expose the absurdity of his society and return it to the core values of a sound society—belief in justice and truth. A prophet should also support the virtues of wisdom, kindness, tolerance, sacrifice, leadership, modesty, and candour. These are the opposite traits of those in positions of power. A prophet should have the capacity to stand up to his people and take action to alter the status quo at the same time. Being a prophet gives one the authority to change societies—not just to keep things hidden. Thus, prophethood is a political authority in that it does more than just criticize established political orders; it also challenges and changes them. Making positive changes to civilizations comes with a cost. Thus, in the Quranic view, Muḥammad's and Noah's journeys serve as models for how to dismantle corrupt, power-based systems to build honest and equitable communities.

Conclusion

Academic and exegetical literature has mostly concentrated on the sequence of events and the struggle between Noah's people, who were inclined towards idolatry, and his community of faith in God. Through this analysis, the story of Noah can be interpreted as a symbol of the debate that was occurring among Prophet Muḥammad's followers regarding his dealings with his enemies. The story juxtaposes the question of the unsure (loyalty to disbelievers) with a definitive response that silences any doubts or uncertainties within the first Muslim community around the Prophet. We can conclude that the debate was equally as intense in the believing Muslim community and that there was a strong temptation to make amends and coexist with the unbelievers given the intensity and threefold recurrence of the polemic in this narrative (verses 25–49), which places the flood event in the background. Reconciliation represented a major risk of forming an alliance with unbelievers or at least making concessions to them.

The debate centres on whether relationships between believers and non-believers should take into account links to one's community, family, or ethnicity. There are two opposing viewpoints in the Noah story: one voice is doubtful and unsure, contending that similarities imply a shared fate and that, as a result, maintaining relationships would be the best course of action. The other viewpoint is that of certainty and the definitive solution, which holds that the only possible relationship between believers and non-believers is that of rupture, with divine punishment serving as the apex of this conflict and a means of punishing non-believers for their rejection of faith and contempt for believers; as Noah broke with his people, so too must early Muslims break with non-believers.

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