

Episode 27

The concept of revelation in Christianity and Islam

Mohamed: *My dear viewers. We welcome you again to our program, "Questions About Faith". And it is our pleasure to welcome our honorable guest, Father Zakaria Botros. You are most welcome.*

F Zakaria: Thank you.

Mohamed: *My dear viewers, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "For assuredly, I say to you: Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled". We have spoken earlier about parts of the Scriptures, and also about abrogation. We have established that it is not prohibited to inquire about religion. As to this episode, we will continue to talk along this line and discuss the topic of revelation. One of the questions that we received says, "What is the concept of revelation in Christianity, and how has it happened?"*

F Zakaria: Well, as for revelation in Christianity, the Bible says: "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The concept of revelation in Christianity is that God communicates the intended divine meaning through spiritual communication between the prophet and God. So the Holy Spirit, as we believe, is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God imparts and communicates the meanings and the ideas, as well as the essence of the subject to man's spirit. Then the recipient can meditate upon them, identify and

unite with them as well as live them. And after, that he starts to express them totally, yet God safeguards their infallibility, because the Spirit of God is in full control of this man's life, and He controls the communication of the message. So then, revelation in Christianity is, God's words being revealed by the Holy Spirit to the person or the given prophet, who unites spiritually with God, and stays in God's presence, having his mind totally yielded to God with an open spirit, that it might unite with God. At that point of time he is able to receive God's mind. But we, the Bible says, have the mind of Christ.

Mohamed: Does this happen through a certain mediator?

F Zakaria: In Christianity there is no mediation. There are no mediators in Christianity. Christianity is a relationship between man and God, and it is not one of duty and routine, and a set of “dos” and “don'ts”. It is not a remote control type of relationship. It is the unity between the spirit of man and God, through which God's mind is communicated to man, and hence the Bible is revealed. The Bible is made up of two Testaments. This is the complete Bible. The Old Testament and the New Testament.

Mohamed: What do these Old and New Testaments consist of?

F Zakaria: The Old Testament was written by the Jewish prophets of old who came before Christ. We put both Testaments together because we believe that The Old Testament is full of prophecies and symbols of

Christ which were completed and fulfilled in Him. We put them both together and call them the Holy Bible.

Mohamed: What about Zaboor?

F Zakaria: Zaboor refers to the Psalms of the prophet David and they are part of The Old Testament.

Mohamed: What do you mean by Psalms?

F Zakaria: “Psalms” means praises and hymns.

Mohamed: Are they like petitions or prayers and supplications?

F Zakaria: Yes, supplications, prayers, songs, hymns, and praises. So this is The Old Testament and the New Testament. The concept is one and the same in both. When you read from the first page till the last, you find no contradiction. The whole Bible revolves around one center and has one goal; God's revelation to man about the person of Christ, Who loves mankind, and came to redeem them and atone for their sins, and open His arms to receive the worst sinner and grant him life, a more abundant life, an eternal life. This is the concept of revelation. God reveals His thoughts, meanings, instructions, the principles to someone He chooses to be a prophet, or an apostle who would convey this message to others.

Mohamed: So this book is the Bible of the Christians, or the people of the Book. And they are not unbelievers, they rather believe in a book revealed by God?

F Zakaria: Yes, definitely. And there are Quranic verses that support this. One of them says, "And do not argue with the people of the Book unless it be in the politest manner and say, we believe in what has been sent down to us (which means the Quran) and that which has been sent down to you, (which is the Gospel –Injeel- and the Torah) and our God and your God is the same One." It is true that this verse has been abrogated by Meccan Surahs. But why was it approved in the Medinan Surahs? What in the world had happened? So this is revelation, as far as Christianity is concerned.

Mohamed: *There is another question: Based on your readings in Islamic reference books, what is the concept of revelation in Islam? And would you please compare revelation in Christianity and revelation in Islam as well?*

F Zakaria: Ah, yes of course. So many books have been written about revelation in Islam. Among what was written in this regard, what we find on the internet, in Al Azhr website under the section "Muslim concepts", Mafaheem Islamia. There is an article by professor Doctor Abd El Lateef Mohamed El A'abd. The article is short, brief and comprehensive about revelation in Islam. He says, "Revelation lingually means both the book and the gathering of it. To reveal something is to communicate it to somebody. To reveal to someone means to tell him words that are hidden to others. But as a legal term it means God's revelation to one of his prophets regarding a legal ruling or something similar to it."

Mohamed: *And how did that happen?*

F Zakaria: He says, through a mediator, or without one. So then, revelation is the impartation of Divine knowledge to a prophet or an apostle, through angels. And this is the difference between us and Islam. We believe that revelation comes directly from God to the prophet, because the prophet himself is the mediator to mankind. So there isn't such a thing as God having a mediator to the prophet, and then another mediator to mankind. So this is the difference between us. "To communicate it to the people, provided that God's knowledge is established in the preserved tablet." And I believe we have spoken about this subject a lot in the previous episodes. Then he goes on to say the following: "In one verse the Quran referred to three positions of revelation, in the verse that says: it is not fitting for God to speak to any human being except through inspiration, or from behind a curtain, or by sending a messenger, to reveal by His permission anything He wants. So here he divides them up. First through inspiration which is the casting of a meaning into the heart". Here he comes close to the Christian concept; "and it means also that God, may He be blessed and exalted, casts in the comprehension of the prophet something that is incontestably from God, as is written in the Saheeh of Ibn Hayyan on the strings of Ibn Maso'ud, quoting the prophet that the Holy Spirit breathed into my comprehension, this is a tradition, that no soul would die until it has lived out its divine blessings and time span, therefore fear God." So here, he is being directly inspired, in the sense that the meaning came into his comprehension. "The second category is from behind the curtain. That is, by means of a discourse. As when God spoke to Moses and when he asked about the vision after

the discourse, he was hidden from it. But he heard the call from behind the tree, from the shore of the right valley in the holy place, saying, "Moses, I'm God, the Lord of all beings." So here is from behind a curtain like the tree in this case. "The third category is, by the sending down of Gabriel, who is entrusted with the inspiration down upon our prophet, that is Mohamed, the prophet of Islam, and upon the prophets who came before him". But there is no proof in the case of the previous prophets. "Gabriel has not really been sent with revelation to any previous prophet." Al Bokhary narrated, on the strings of Aisha, may God be pleased with her, that Hareth Ibn Hesham, may God be pleased with him, asked the messenger of God, saying: " Oh messenger of God, how does the inspiration come to you? He answered, "sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell and that is the hardest form for me, and by the time it departs from me I have memorized it. And sometimes the angel appears to me in the form of a man and talks to me, in such a way that I can memorize what he says. "These are the three types of revelation, either direct, or from behind the curtain, or revelation by means of Gabriel, an angel. So there is a big difference between Christianity and Islam in terms of the concept of revelation. We may agree only on the first category. But that it may come through an angel, is something that we don't believe in. The Lord Jesus, God incarnated, or God appearing in the form of man, gave all his thoughts to the disciples, and they wrote down these things. They were his apostles. So as the Bible says, "For prophecy never came by the will of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." And here I want to note a very important thing. No man can understand the Bible unless he asks for the assistance of the Holy Spirit,

because He is the Teacher; He is the one Who wrote it down. Therefore we pray to God and say, “Holy Spirit of God, help me understand the words I'm about to read.”

Mohamed: Father you have mentioned that Al Hareth Ibn Hisham asked the messenger, “How does revelation come to you?” And you mentioned that he said that, "It sometimes comes to me like the ringing of a bell.” The question is: what are the phenomena accompanying the appearance of the angel who is bringing the revelation in Christianity and in Islam as well?

F Zakaria: In Christianity, if we take, as an example, the appearance of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary in chapter one in the Gospel according to Luke, as soon as the angel appeared to her, he said: "Peace be unto you, highly favored one. The Lord is with you." And when she realized that this was very odd, he said to her: “Do not be afraid.” This is our understanding in Christianity. The appearance of the angels of God gives peace, gives serenity, gives tranquility, gives security, and reassurance. But what surprises me, as I read Islamic books, like what I found in a book entitled “Mishkat Al Masabeeh” in the chapter of Ba’eth and Bad’ Al Wahy, printed in Pakistan. The book says when Gabriel came to Mohamed in the cave of Hera’a, he came back to Khadeega with a trembling heart and said wrap me up, wrap me up, cover me. So they covered him. And it seems that he lost consciousness because they sprinkled water on him until he came back to his senses. And it is said that Khadeega tested him in order to know if Satan was the one who appeared to him. Owing to his terror, she thought perhaps it was Satan who appeared to him. It is also written that whenever the inspiration came to him,

certain manifestations showed on him that made those present wait for a Quranic verse from him. On the strings of Aisha, the messenger was asked how does inspiration come to you? That's the same question that has been asked before. Mohamed answered, "Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell and then it is the hardest on me so I lose consciousness and sometimes the angel appears to me in the form of a man." In the same book it is mentioned that Aisha said, "I have seen the inspiration come down on him on a very cold day causing him to lose consciousness and his forehead would be oozing with sweat." These are very odd indications indeed. Muslim also narrated that whenever inspiration came down upon the prophet, he would be seized with distress and his face would take on a glowering expression, which in Arabic means to grow red and dark. Ibn Ishak again says that Mohamed used to be charmed against the evil eye in Mecca before the Quran came down upon him. So they used to recite incantations to him before the Quran came to him. Then he goes on to say, "and when the Quran came down upon him he was afflicted with the same thing that used to afflict him before." So they used to charm him in order to soothe him and calm him down. And when the inspiration came down upon him, he was seized with the same seizures that had afflicted him before. And it has been made known by some, as Al Halaby mentions in his book entitled, "Insan Al O'uyoon", that Amna the mother of Mohamed, had charmed him against the evil eye. And it is also said that the messenger of God said to Khadeega, "Whenever I am alone I hear two callings, saying: "O Mohamed. O Mohamed." In another version it says, "and I see light and hear a voice," and in a third version Mohamed says, "And I fear that whoever is calling me is a familiar spirit

of the ginnie (that is, a demon). But one should be able to tell the difference between a demon and an angel. And in another narration Mohamed says: "I'm afraid that I'm afflicted with madness." This has been narrated by Ibn Ishak because he was afflicted with a condition similar to unconsciousness after a period of convulsion. His eyelids would shut up and his face would turn red and dark and he would snort loud like camels. Very strange phenomena. It has been narrated on the strings of Abu Huraira that whenever Mohamed received the inspiration he would be seized by convulsion and his face would have a glowering expression, that is, "turn red and dark" and he would shut his eyes tight and snort loud like the camels with blood red eyes. These are all the phenomena. You have asked about the phenomena. And according to Omar Ibn Al Khatab, whenever inspiration came down upon Mohamed, people near his face would hear buzzing like that of bees. Again, on the strings of Abu Huraira, people used to put henna on his head because of the headache that used to afflict him. You find this written in a book entitled, "Mer'aat Al Ka'emat". "The Mirror of Creatures". There are a whole lot more. Do you want me to go on?

Mohamed: Go ahead.

F Zakaria: In a book entitled, "Insan Al O'uyoon", according to Zaid Ibn Thabet: "Whenever the inspiration comes upon him he would become so heavy, and once his leg fell upon mine," (this is Zaid Ibn Thabet narrating that) once his leg fell upon mine and I swear by God that I have not seen any leg heavier than that of the messenger of God." And sometimes inspiration comes upon him while he is on camel back and the camel would

fall down under him and collapse. And whenever the inspiration came upon the prophet it seemed as though his spirit was being taken out of him, because he would faint and he would appear drunk. These are very strange signs.

Mohamed: And all those things are written in Islamic reference books, right?

F Zakaria: Oh, yes. It is also mentioned that these signs or phenomena did not start with the coming down of prophecy on him, but since his childhood. When he was a little child in the desert at the house of his wet-nurse, something similar to this happened to him. This was seen and narrated by Muslim, on the strings of Anas. He said, “Gabriel came to him as he was playing with the boys, took him, knocked him down, split his heart open and took out of it a clot and said, ‘this is the portion of Satan in you’. Then he washed him in a basin of gold with the water of the Zamzam spring, (then sort of welded him back), brought him back to his place, the boys came seeking his wet-nurse, saying ‘Mohamed had been killed’ and when they received him later he was very pale”. And here Anas said, “I used to see the scar of sewing in his chest”. In the footnote of this narration, the author of “Miskat Al Masabeeh” said, “This splitting happened to him - may God’s prayer be upon him - as they say many times, at Halima’s, his wet-nurse when he was 10 years old, then again when Gabriel called him in the cave of Hera’a then on the Me’erag on the Night of Isra’a”. So on three different occasions Gabriel removed from him the devil's portion. This is very difficult for someone to imagine and to grasp. This causes a whole lot of question marks. Someone who respects his own

intelligence would seek and require answers to all those questions. This, for example, poses a question. How much of Satan's portion was there in his heart then? That every now and then his chest would be split open like that?

Mohamed: As a matter of fact, I personally have never heard of this before, at all.

F Zakaria: Though you were a Muslim yourself.

Mohamed: Yes.

F. Zakaria: They hush those things up.

Mohamed: But all these things are in Islamic reference books.

F Zakaria: Oh, yes. And I mention each one by name. For example, Ibn Hesham says, and he is the chief biographer of Mohamed, that the husband of Halima, his wet nurse said: "I'm afraid that this boy is demon possessed." What a world of difference! He says, "take him back to his folk before this gets known about him", and when she had returned him to his mother Amna, she said to her, "Have you feared that he may be demon possessed?" "Yes", she answered. So this is what has been narrated about the phenomena accompanying the inspiration, in the case of the prophet Mohamed. These things make one think, and they do require answers and explanations. We know that angels come in peace. When they come, they come peacefully. When the angel appeared, he said "Peace be unto you, highly favored one. The Lord is with you." So it is peaceful. When the

angel appeared to Zachariah at the temple and gave him the good news about the birth of John, he was not epileptic, or seized with terror. We need to be asking ourselves, why does this happen here? And why does it happen differently there? The intellect must pose questions. Do you see my point? It has been 14 centuries my dear friend, 14 whole centuries since this happened and as you said, you were Muslim all your life and you didn't know anything about this. Why? Because they are hushed up, blacked out. They are unquestionable. But what a pity! What about all these people, all these men and women? Don't they have the right to understand those things, and to know what is right and what is wrong? And whether or not angels do come in this manner and such manifestations? What is it then that made those people doubt whether this was an angel or a demon? These things are really odd. And this makes me say, this is the responsibility of each and every Muslim. You cannot say, I grew up and I found my father teaching me so. You can't say it is simply so. God will judge everyone on the Day of Judgment and will ask you how did you walk in life? Will you answer, "I just followed the herd"? He will ask you, "But where is your mind? Why didn't you use it? Why didn't you benefit from it? Why didn't you use it to think? Why didn't you ask? Why didn't you ask Me for guidance? I would have led you." I believe that someone like yourself, who made this leap from your past to the present and your open-mindedness to these facts, I think you are not the only one. I believe there are so many like you who made this move. The people, for example, whom I personally know and they are counted by the hundreds, and now they have become thousands.

Mohamed: I also know this myself, that there are thousands of Muslims who searched for God and they managed to have peace with God. And I recall a comforting verse that says, "The young lions lack and suffer hunger but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing". As a matter of fact, the things that you mentioned, dear Father, are indeed heartbreaking. It really makes my heart sad to know those things that are hidden from many people. And I believe that many will reject your words and that many will be raged.

F Zakaria: This is not what we want, honestly. All we want is to make the Muslim inquire. Maybe he will get some answers. If he doesn't get answers that convince his mind and satisfy him, he is free to make his own decision. But what I want to say is that, there are so many that I personally, and you yourself know, who have crossed from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the freedom of the glory of the Children of God. I spotted in your hand, a book entitled, "Sons of Ishmael" What does it talk about?

Mohamed: Yes. The book is right here. It is entitled, "The Sons of Ishmael". This book narrates the biography of many people who were Muslims, and then accepted and received faith in Christ, and received Christ as a personal Savior of their lives. And as Christ said "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live". I have met so many of them, in many Arab countries and also in the West. And as Father mentioned here, they are counted by the thousands.

F Zakaria: Why have they been called “Sons of Ishmael”?

Mohamed: Because in the Bible there is mention of the son of the promise. And it says that Ishmael was not the son of the promise, but Ishmael is also a son of Abraham and God promised his salvation to all people because God desires “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”. All of the people mentioned in the book here, were Muslims.

F. Zakaria: From the offspring of Ishmael.

Mohamed: From the offspring of Ishmael, yes. They received Christ. And this book is available and you can get it. You will see the address on the screen and if you have any questions, we welcome them all. And we thank you very much. Also there is an address that will appear on the screen, of the homepage of the Reverend Zakaria Botros. You can also contact him personally if you have any inquiries. And if you want to receive a free copy of the Bible, it is our pleasure to send it to you. Contact us at the address that you see now on the screen. See you again, thank you.