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ISLAMIC VARIATIONS ON A BIBLICAL THEME AS SEEN IN THE DAVID AND BATHSHEBA SAGA[1]

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a story which is common to the three great monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: namely, that of David and Bathsheba. This story was conceived within the context of Judaism, was adopted by Christianity in its original form with the acceptance of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Christian canon, and was included within Islamic literature, though in a somewhat different format. The paper attempts to draw out the significant differences between the Jewish and Islamic accounts of the story of David and Bathsheba, and in the process also examines a range of associated elements, including exegetical comment on both biblical and Qur'anic texts.

II. THE HISTORICAL SETTING

The biblical books of Samuel and Kings represent some of the most significant historical writings to be produced by inhabitants of the ancient Near East. These works were written during a period of great kingdoms which were bitter rivals for the land covered by the ancient Near East, and the historical records remaining from those kingdoms which testify to daily life during that period are fragmentary. It is thus remarkable that the historical events which occurred amongst the ancient Israelites at the turn of the first millennium BC should be recorded in a manner which is so detailed in scope and so timeless in style.

One of the most compelling incidents related in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible concerns King David's affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah. The events surrounding this incident are graphically captured in 2 Samuel 11-12. Jorge Pixley

1 An earlier version of this paper was written for St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra, Australia, in 1994. The author wishes to thank Father Terence McKenna for his comments on the original version.

speculates that the style of the account suggests that it was written by an actual eye-witness of the events inside the court of David, and he states further that 'it can justly be called the earliest historical writing of humankind'.[2]

Pixley is not the only biblical scholar to be struck by the account of David and Bathsheba. H.H. Rowley appears to have been similarly impressed:

> The story of David's great sin with Bathsheba is one of the most significant in the Old Testament. It shows the courage and stern devotion to principle which marked the God-inspired prophet, and, still more, the humility and contrition with which the king accepted Nathan's denunciation. Such an attitude would have been inconceivable anywhere else in the ancient east.[3]

The period covered by these events was crucial to the consolidation of the identity of the Israelites as a separate nation. After a period of exile in Egypt and tribal disunity in Canaan, the Israelites were assembled into a united nation by the first king, Saul, whose God-given mantle was duly handed to David by God's prophet Samuel after Saul strayed from leading a godly life. David was to become arguably Israel's greatest king though he, too, was to fall prey to his human flaws, as demonstrated in his sin with Bathsheba.

It is not the purpose of this present study to focus upon determining the historicity of the David and Bathsheba saga. As has been persuasively argued by Walter Brueggemann,[4] scriptural exegesis has for too long been hijacked by the agents of historical criticism in an attempt to ward off the challenges of the modern scientific era. Brueggemann argues for primacy of respect to be given to the integrity of the scriptural text in its own right, and this is the approach proposed in this current study and followed in the succeeding pages. For our purposes, it is accepted that the events described in 2 Samuel relating to the rule of King David were representative of Israelite life of that period, and the text recounting these events will be accorded due recognition and integrity.

2 Jorge Pixley, *Biblical Israel: A People's History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 45-46.

3 H.H. Rowley (ed.), *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 365-66.

4 See Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACCOUNTS

1. The biblical account

The two biblical chapters which present the David and Bathsheba saga, 2 Samuel 11-12, stand out as being among the most graphically universal and eternal pieces of scriptural narrative.

The account begins with a type of scene which has happened in all locations, amongst all communities, and indeed which would be recognised by all readers: namely, the captivation of King David by the beauty of Bathsheba. Having set the scene in such a realistic manner, the author of this passage gives a fascinating insight into social mores of the time in referring to Bathsheba's monthly cycle by saying: 'She had purified herself from her uncleanness' (2 Sam. 11:4). Though such an attitude of considering the monthly cycle as unclean may not sit well with the modern West, it is certainly relevant to a number of Eastern societies such as Balinese Hindus and practising Muslims, who distance menstruating women from certain events of public significance, such as communal worship.

Having committed the transgression, with the resulting pregnancy of Bathsheba, David is forced into planning a deception and accordingly brings Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to Jerusalem. He engages him initially in small talk, asking him about the progress of the war and the welfare of Joab, and then sends him off to his house with sumptuous quantities of food designed to ensure that he will make the most of his domestic opportunity. This is one of the most tantalising moments of the narrative, as the reader is struck by the stark contrast between the deceiving behaviour of God's anointed king and the unstinting fidelity of Uriah, who is not even an Israelite. Uriah shuns his wife's bed out of sympathy with his fellow soldiers who are still in the field; even when David tries a second time to have him enticed to his house (2 Sam. 11:13), Uriah's loyalty to his comrades remains paramount.

This leads to the murder. The passage of events leading up to the actual killing of Uriah reflects great narrative skill on the part of the author. There is a build-up of tension when Joab assigns Uriah to 'a place where he knew the strongest defenders' were located on the battlefield (2 Sam. 11:16). With the death of Uriah, Joab constructs a series of arguments designed to protect the messenger from incurring the wrath of the king (2 Sam. 11:20-21).

David's and Bathsheba's reward is short-lived. Even in the two short verses which describe the period of mourning and subsequent

marriage of the two, one senses the impending divine retribution. This retribution is swift in coming, but it is of interest that God does not merely pass judgment and impose punishment; he devises a stratagem by leading Nathan to tease David with the analogy of the rich man and the poor man. This God-inspired stratagem is somewhat reminiscent of the ruse given to Samuel by God at the time of David's identification while a boy as the future King of Israel. Brueggemann refers to 'a lie' devised by God and given to Samuel to enable him to achieve his ends.[5] While the description of this ruse as a lie is perhaps overstating the point, God's subtle technique in initially identifying and anointing the child David is somewhat similar to the ruse given to Nathan by God for the purpose of bringing the adult David to a realisation of his sin.

Condemnation follows Nathan's analogy; one of the most striking phrases of the Bible which makes the reader shudder in awe is the divine accusation contained in 2 Samuel 12:7, namely 'You are the man'. David stands condemned, and his punishment is pronounced by Nathan in a way which is fully consistent with the law codes of the Pentateuch based on the concept of 'an eye for an eye'. Nevertheless, David's repentance is total, he acknowledges his sin, and though punished, he is not dethroned by God. He witnesses the death of the child which was conceived by his adulterous act with Bathsheba, but rather than engaging in worldly grief, David rises above this and demonstrates his great wisdom by use of the simple logic explaining why he chose to fast before the death of his child but not after.

The narrative is not left hanging in the air, but is rounded off neatly with the fall of the Ammonite city of Rabbah, the carrying off of the booty, and the enslavement of the citizens of Rabbah, which demonstrates the harsh justice meted out by victors in Old Testament warfare.

Thus, this story has provided a little of all the major components of good narrative: realism, romance, pathos, fear, intrigue, retribution, repentance and action. It is little wonder that some claim it must have been written by an actual witness of the events recounted therein.

2. The Qur'anic account

The Qur'anic version of events[6] represents a brief interlude embedded in a lengthy chapter largely devoted to expounding on moral and

5 Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 80-81.
6 Refer to Appendix B.

religious virtue. Verses 21-26 of Sura *Sad*, Chapter 38 of the Qur'an, contain a short account which is reminiscent of the David and Bathsheba story.[7] The setting for this account is characteristic of the Qur'an, in that it is grounded in a dialogue between Allah and Muhammad. Allah instructs Muhammad to remember David, and in a short overture to this story (verses 17-20), Allah testifies to David's greatness with a series of allusions to his qualities which are almost superhuman.

The Qur'an then embarks upon the story of the 'two disputants' who came face to face with David in his chamber. Immediately the account seems to beg questions by making reference to the disputants 'climbing the walls of the sanctuary'. The reader wonders about the relevance of this statement and its significance to succeeding events. One needs to refer to Islamic exegetes to find an explanation, rather than finding clarification within the Qur'anic account itself.

David is duly alarmed by the sudden appearance of these two men, but they assuage his fears by quickly explaining that they seek his judgment in a dispute which has occurred between them. This short exchange is as telescopic as is the whole account, and it is followed by a brief explanation of the nature of the dispute: an argument over possession of ewes which in its simplicity resembles a tug of war between two brothers over their favourite toy.

David's judgment in response is brief, instantaneous, and represents an encapsulated statement of faith, that those who do good works and have faith are few in number but will receive Allah's rewards. In giving judgment, David is aware that he has been put to the test, and immediately seeks forgiveness of Allah in penitence. Allah's forgiveness is immediately forthcoming without punishment. The nature of David's sin is not given in the Qur'anic text, though there is a brief allusion to it in verse 26 when Allah instructs David not to 'follow caprice' and finally enunciates the divine warning that those who stray from Allah's path will be damned. David is also made Vicegerent, with responsibility to carry Allah's message to his people and to provide a model of upright behaviour.

Thus ends the Qur'anic account. It is difficult to adhere strictly to Brueggemann's reading guidelines in such an account as it has raised

7 Nevertheless, though short, this section is significant enough for it to result in the chapter which contains it being referred to on occasions as the Chapter of David; cf. Anthony Hearle Johns, 'David and Bathsheba: A Case Study in the Exegesis of Qur'anic Story-telling', *Mélanges de L'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire* (MIDEO) 19 (1989), 227.

so many questions without providing answers. The story appears incomplete and seems to be grounded on a series of facts which are not stated overtly within this text. Thus it is not sufficient to limit oneself to the Qur'anic text alone; the reader is obliged to seek answers from the body of exegetical material which has been assembled by succeeding generations of commentators. Such an examination will be conducted briefly in a subsequent section of this paper.

IV. THE BIBLICAL AND QUR'ANIC ACCOUNTS IN CONTRAST

Before considering the points of intersection and difference between the biblical and Qur'anic accounts of this story,[8] it would be useful to focus briefly on two issues: the dates of composition of the respective accounts, and the respective perceptions of the central character, King David. The biblical account appears to have been composed sometime during the 10th century BC, during a significant formative period in the history of ancient Israel. Likewise, the Qur'anic account was composed in the 620s, during the earliest period of Islamic history. Thus, although the date of composition and the physical length of the stories differ, they both emerged during the formative periods of their respective communities, and have served to provide a model of godly behaviour to early believers and a forum for expounding certain divine injunctions.

A significant difference between Judaism and Islam with respect to this story concerns the roles attributed by each faith to the principal actor, David. Within Judaism, David is a king – arguably the greatest king in the history of ancient Israel, because of his establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the kingdom and because of the literary output of his reign, chiefly the Psalms, which were taken up into the corpus of the Jewish sacred canon. In Islam, however, David is considered not only as king but more importantly as prophet. In fact, he is considered one of the greatest prophets to precede Muhammad, due to his being the recipient of one of the great revelations from Allah, the Psalms.[9]

8 Refer to Appendix A for a tabulated summary.

9 Islam considers that Allah sent down multiple revelations to humanity, including those four which survive: the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and the Qur'an. Islam claims that the first three were corrupted by their respective communities, which necessitated the last and greatest revelation, the Qur'an, revealed by Allah to Muhammad, which supplants all predecessors.

The above-mentioned difference in David's role between Judaism and Islam has direct ramifications for the form of the story as related in the Bible and the Qur'an respectively. Though a great Jewish king, David like all kings was subject to human failings, errors of judgment and sin. The example of his sin with Bathsheba is graphically depicted in considerable detail within the Bible; in fact, an entire chapter of the Bible is devoted to an exposé of David's error. In contrast, however, prophets in Islam are depicted as models of upright behaviour, and to all intents and purposes are free from sin. Thus the detail of David's sin is deleted from the Qur'anic account. There is merely an allusion to this sin, with the principal focus being placed upon repentance, forgiveness and David's greatness, rather than providing the reader with the detail of the sin as occurs in the Bible. This issue will be explored further in the next section.

The Qur'anic account of David and Bathsheba can be viewed from two perspectives: a Jewish/Christian perspective and an Islamic perspective. Jews and Christians would consider the Qur'anic account to be greatly reductionist when compared to that occurring in the Bible. There appear to be many lacunae in the Qur'anic version: there is no detail about David's sin, nor is any mention made of either Bathsheba or her husband, Uriah, or indeed about the details of David's punishment. In fact, the Qur'anic account seems to begin at the mid-point of the biblical account with David's repentance and God's forgiveness.

The Muslim perspective is entirely different. Rather than seeing the relative shortage of detailed information in the Qur'anic account as a weakness, Muslims believe that – since the Qur'an is the flawless word of Allah – the extra information presented in the Bible must be an interpolation drawn from unreliable sources.[10] Thus, the details of David's sin, concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, as well as the punishments suffered by David subsequently, are not to be trusted as authentic, according to Muslim belief.

Nevertheless, there are certain elements which are common to both the biblical and Qur'anic accounts. These principally concern the account of the two sheep owners: one with many sheep and the other with few. Even here, however, certain essential details differ, and they vary in a way which leads many readers to feel intuitively that the later account inaccurately reported some of the narrative detail because the

10 This represents an example of the Muslim belief that the Jews tampered with the original revelation, hence necessitating subsequent revelation.

narrator had an imperfect knowledge of the original story. Consider the following differences with regard to this part of the David and Bathsheba story:

(1) The biblical account presents the prophet Nathan visiting David to relate the story of the two sheep owners. The Qur'anic account makes no mention of Nathan; instead it describes the two sheep owners visiting David.

(2) In the biblical account, Nathan's story of the two sheep owners is presented overtly as a parable, related for didactic purposes. In the Qur'anic account, the two sheep owners present their story as a factual event.[11]

(3) The biblical account makes no suggestion of the two men being related. The Qur'anic account describes them as relatives.[12]

(4) The biblical account does not indicate how many sheep the wealthy sheep owner possessed. The Qur'an indicates that he had ninety-nine ewes.

(5) The biblical account in 2 Samuel 12:1 indicates that the wealthy man owned a range of livestock, both sheep and cattle, whereas the Qur'an only refers to him owning sheep.

(6) Though both accounts refer to David spending lengthy periods of time in penitence, the Bible explains the immediate reason; i.e. the death of his child. The Qur'an, however, does not support the description of penitence with any specific reason or justification.

(7) In both scriptures the story is designed to teach a moral. In the Bible, the moral is implicit and is interwoven throughout the copious narrative. In the Qur'an, the moral is stated explicitly at 38:26, as if the audience needed the message stated in stark terms for the full effect to be felt.

Many details are presented in the biblical account which seem to be of marginal relevance to the moral of the story, but are presented more for historical record. An example concerns Joab's anticipation of David's wrath with the former's having sent his troops close to the walls of the besieged city, Rabbah. Another case in point concerns David's performance of acts of penitence prior to, but not after, the death of the first child born to Bathsheba. Still another example concerns the description of the ultimate fall of Rabbah to the Jews and the enslavement of its inhabitants.

11 Nevertheless, Qur'anic exegetes generally regard this as a parable, and the two men as angels in disguise.

12 Though it does not develop this relationship as being in any way significant for the story.

The absence of these details from the Qur'anic account, as well as those mentioned previously, points to the different purposes of this story within the Jewish and Muslim traditions. The goals of the biblical account seem to be multifaceted: entertainment, historical record, didactics, and portrayal of various human characteristics – faithfulness, unfaithfulness and deceit. The Qur'anic account appears to have one primary didactic goal, in contrast, and lacks the other elements which make the biblical account so colourful and appealing. The question which cannot be resolved by scientific method, and which becomes a matter of faith, is whether the Qur'an lacks the extra elements of the biblical account mentioned above because Muhammad had an imperfect and incomplete knowledge of the biblical story.[13]

V. COMMENTS BY ISLAMIC EXEGETES

The relative paucity of detail in the Qur'anic account led early Islamic scholars on a quest for exegetical information which could fill out the seeming gaps in the Qur'anic account of the David story. This quest was essentially satisfied by early converts to Islam from Judaism, among whom the most prominent names were Ka'b al-Ahbar and Wahb b. Munabbih. These figures became prominent Islamic scholars in their own right, alongside other early scholars whose religious formation had been exclusively within the context of Islamic belief. The converts brought with them into Islam a detailed knowledge of the Bible and of some of the great Jewish Aggadah narratives. This body of pre-Islamic information which was brought into Islam was to have various effects: it answered many questions of detail which the Qur'anic text itself raised but did not answer, as in the case of the David story, but it also resulted in a polemic which was to last into the modern era.

Many of the early Qur'anic commentators, such as Muqatil b. Sulayman and al-Tabari, explained Q38:17-26 by using details which were clearly based on the biblical story of David and Bathsheba, and in so doing they quoted their sources as including the early converts referred to above.[14] But in many ways the Islamic work which most faithfully draws on biblical details of this account is *Qisas al-anbiya'*

13 Muhammad clearly had contacts, prior to the compilation of the Qur'an, with Jewish communities and with Nestorian Christian communities in Arabia and Syria. Either could have acted as the source of his knowledge of the David and Bathsheba story and, for that matter, of his knowledge of the Bible.

14 Johns, 'David and Bathsheba', 229.

(Stories of the Prophets) by al-Tha'labi (d. 1030), which assumed a degree of authority which enabled it usefully to complement the text of the Qur'an and Qur'anic commentaries as sources of information for generations of Islamic exegetes. This work is not itself a commentary upon the Qur'an. It consists of stories relating to the lives of the Islamic prophets drawn from a range of authoritative exegetical sources, and it therefore sits comfortably alongside the major commentaries for the purposes of study of Qur'anic exegesis.[15]

In *Qisas al-anbiya'*, al-Tha'labi actually mentions the name of Uriah and overtly spells out the details of David's deception. It should be noted that at no stage does al-Tha'labi or, indeed, other leading Islamic commentators, suggest that David actually committed adultery with Bathsheba. At worst David is portrayed as having engineered the death of Uriah so that Bathsheba would be free to become his wife. Al-Tha'labi relates that David's sin was in part due to the fact that having caught sight of Bathsheba from his roof-top, he deliberately and willingly took a second look, and this led to his scheme which resulted in the death of Uriah. Al-Tha'labi's story is eclectic in as much as it offers a number of different explanations: for example, another explanation offered was that Bathsheba was only betrothed to Uriah, but David nevertheless proposed to her, thus contravening the social mores of the time.

The early scholars such as al-Tha'labi, in presenting exegetical information of this sort, were posing a dilemma for many of their contemporaries. There was, and indeed still is, an overriding doctrine of prophetic impeccability which did not sit well with the notion of the prophet David deliberately breaking Allah's rules. Indeed, there has been much debate throughout the centuries of Islamic history regarding the acceptability of information brought into Islam by Jewish converts. There are many suspicions of Judeo-Islamic traditions, called the *Isra'iliyyat*, which many Muslims believe were based on a flawed faith, namely Judaism, and which therefore tended to pollute the new faith of Islam which Muslims believed had been given to humanity by Allah to renew Allah's covenant with humanity one final time. By drawing on Jewish stories, especially those which depicted prophets in an unfavourable light such as the cases described above, al-Tha'labi

15 It should be noted that al-Tha'labi also compiled a lengthy commentary on the Qur'an which included extensive information also contained in *Qisas al-anbiya'* and which similarly used a narrative approach to theological exposition.

was risking severe criticism from both his contemporaries and subsequent generations of orthodox Islamic exegetes.

There has been a strong tendency throughout the course of Islamic history both to standardise and sanitise religious teaching. Standardisation occurred, for example, when instructions were sent out to destroy all versions of the Qur'an in the early years which differed from that endorsed by the Caliph 'Uthman. Sanitisation has occurred at many times in various ways, but an example which is relevant to our present purposes is found in the tendency by many Muslim scholars to delete information which may have been cited by earlier generations of scholars but which they find offensive to their understanding of basic Islamic doctrine, even if this results in the Qur'anic text itself raising questions which cannot be answered.

Thus al-Tha'labi, and subsequent scholars who based themselves heavily on his approach, such as al-Baghawi (d. 1122) and al-Khazin (d. 1340), have for centuries been regarded with much suspicion by many Muslim scholars. Nevertheless, the colourful stories recorded by al-Tha'labi and by his disciples appealed greatly to many Muslims, especially those in Southeast Asia, who found in them 'an ideal means of religious instruction, since they set up the whole edifice of Islamic ideas of creation, human history and God's dealings with man'.[16]

It would be of benefit to examine a short sample of Qur'anic exegetical comment on the David and Bathsheba story in order to see clearly how Qur'anic exegetes filled out the story. The excerpt of commentary which is included in Appendix C is drawn from the leading Malay language commentary *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* written by Abdurrauf of Singkel around 1675; a Southeast Asian example has been chosen for our purposes because of the great popularity of such colourful narratives among Southeast Asian Muslim communities.

Abdurrauf (d. 1693) drew on a range of sources in compiling this work, including the commentary by al-Khazin, one of the principal disciples of al-Tha'labi. But whether referring to al-Khazin or to other exegetical predecessors, Abdurrauf was concerned to take the skeletal outline of the Qur'anic text and convert it into a comprehensive narrative account which could stand alone.[17]

For example, the staccato-like sentence presented in verse 20 of the Qur'an is followed in Abdurrauf's commentary by a short yet vivid description of the large numbers of guardsmen posted around the

16 Johns, 'David and Bathsheba', 226.

17 Much in the same way that the biblical account itself can stand alone.

kingdom each night. This interpolation is not necessary for theological purposes, but it assists the reader to visualise the scene, and it appeals to the narrative inclinations of readers; in other words, it serves the dual purpose of both adding information and entertaining.

Abdurrauf's treatment of verse 23 is deserving of close attention. The commentator has taken it upon himself to play with the Qur'anic text to the point where he discards all reference to 'ewes', replacing it with references to 'wives'. Though this interpretation is consistent with some of the early Qur'anic exegetes as discussed previously, it risks arousing the ire of a more literalist approach to exegesis which foregrounds the doctrine of prophetic impeccability. Nevertheless, Abdurrauf does not mince his words. He identifies al-Khazin as his source, and quotes al-Khazin's source in turn as being Ibn 'Abbas, one of the great early forefathers in the first century of Islam. Such an overt pronouncement that this whole matter concerns wives, not ewes, serves to cement the link between the Qur'anic account and the biblical account of David and Bathsheba. It also demonstrates clearly that though some of the detail may differ, a combination of Qur'an plus exegetical commentary in this case is needed to attain the same level of literary dynamism offered by the stand-alone biblical text.

In his treatment of verse 24, Abdurrauf reverts to talking about sheep rather than wives. Nevertheless, he has made his point in the previous verse, and his concern at this point is not with that particular issue but rather with the reason for Allah's testing of David. He calls upon various accounts explaining the reasons for the test and his interpolation is lengthy, explanatory, and entertaining in its vivid language. For example, the scene of the two angels looking at each other with a knowing smile and ascending to heaven is graphic in its simplicity and most effective. At the end of the same verse, Abdurrauf further consolidates the link with the biblical story of David and Bathsheba by adding the phrase 'because of his love for the woman' in explaining the test.

There can be little doubt that for the story-based stream of exegesis, centred upon scholars such as al-Tha'labi and al-Khazin, the outline account found in Q38:17-26 needed to be filled out with details of the David and Bathsheba story for readers properly to understand the context and import of this Qur'anic story. Without these exegetical contributions, the Qur'an itself begs more questions than it answers in terms of this particular story.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have examined in turn the biblical and Qur'anic accounts of the story of David and Bathsheba. In doing so, we have followed a technique of interpretation in which the scriptural text is allocated due integrity and treated as an independent entity in its own right. We have seen that this approach to scriptural interpretation sits well with the biblical account of the David and Bathsheba story, but leaves many questions unanswered with the Qur'anic account. These missing details were identified in part in the section of this paper devoted to a comparative study of the two scriptural texts.

In an attempt to fill out the Qur'anic story with necessary detail, it has been found beneficial to refer to commentaries upon the Qur'an drawn up by Islamic scholars over the centuries. With regard to the David and Bathsheba account, the details which Qur'anic exegesis provides to complement the Qur'anic account have been shown to have originated from Jewish tradition itself, and to have been brought into Islam by Jewish converts. Use of such information has served the purposes of assembling a necessary body of information supplementary to that contained in the Qur'an. However, it has also highlighted the great controversy which has existed within Islam over the centuries about the very notion of using information sourced in Judaism for the purposes of Qur'anic exegesis.

Many Islamic scholars have chosen to ignore this debate and to call on Judeo-Islamic traditions regardless of the criticism which such a practice attracted. The literary result of such an approach has been the compiling of works such as those by al-Tha'labi, al-Khazin and Abdurrauf, which though in some ways controversial nevertheless represent a colourful addition to narrative-based Islamic literature and which satisfy the natural curiosity of Muslims wishing to learn more about passages from the Qur'an which do not seem to be self-sufficient in their own right in terms of the information they provide.

APPENDIX A
Summary of Narrative Features in the Biblical and Qur'anic Accounts

Features of Narrative	Biblical Account	Qur'anic Account
David a king	X	X
David a prophet		X
Siege of Rabbah mentioned	X	
David's sin mentioned	X	X
Details of David's sin provided	X	
Bathsheba mentioned	X	
Bathsheba described	X	
Uriah mentioned	X	
Story of sheep mentioned	X	X
Nathan meets David	X	
Two sheep owners meet David		X
Two sheep owners = brothers		X
Rich man owns both sheep and cattle	X	
Rich man has 99 ewes		X
Story of sheep = parable	X	
Story of sheep = actual event		X
David repents	X	X
David forgiven by God without punishment		X
David forgiven by God, but punished	X	
Details of David's punishment provided	X	
* Wives taken by neighbours in public	X	
* Firstborn child of Bathsheba dies	X	
Mention of Solomon	X	X
Mention of the fall of Rabbah	X	
Enslavement of inhabitants of Rabbah	X	
Purpose of story		
Entertainment	X	
Record of history	X	
Didactic	X	X
Portray faithfulness (of Uriah)	X	
Portray unfaithfulness (Bathsheba and David)	X	
Portray deceit (David)	X	
Moral of story implicit	X	
Moral of story explicit - stated by God		X

APPENDIX B
English Text of Surah Sad 17-26[18]

38:17 Endure what they say, and remember our servant David, endued with strength, indeed he was constantly turning to God.

38:18 Indeed, we made obedient the hills, they praised (God) along with him at night and in the morning,

38:19 (and made obedient) the birds,[19] gathered together, all constantly were turned to him.

38:20 We strengthened his authority and gave him wisdom, and decisiveness in speech.

38:21 Have you heard the story of the disputation, of when disputants climb the walls of the sanctuary?

38:22 of how they came into David, and he was frightened by them.[20] They said to him: 'Do not be afraid! We are two disputants. One of us has wronged the other, so judge between us with justice. Do not act unjustly, but guide us to the right path.

38:23 This is my brother. He had ninety-nine sheep, and I had one sheep, yet he said, 'Put it in my charge', and whelmed me in speech.'

38:24 David replied: 'He wronged you by asking for your sheep to be put with his sheep. Indeed, there are many dealers in livestock who wrong one another – except those who believe and do good deeds, and how few these are!' David thought that we had put him to the test, so he asked pardon of his Lord. He collapsed in prayer and repented.

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18 Translation from Johns, 'David and Bathsheba', 227-28.

19 George Sale, *The Koran* (London: Frederick Warne, n.d.), 444, observes that this vision of the mountains and birds chanting the praises to relieve David originated from the Talmud.

20 Sale, *The Koran*, 444, draws on Baydawi and Jalalayn in observing that according to Islamic belief, David adhered to a very structured routine, allocating one day to serving God, another in administering justice, another in preaching and witnessing, and another to personal affairs. He used to fast every other day, and spend half of the night in prayer. The sudden appearance of these two men disrupted his routine, thus causing him alarm.

38:25 So we pardoned him that [fault]. Indeed he is close beside us and has a beautiful dwelling-place.

38:26 David! Indeed we have made you a Vicegerent upon the earth, so judge between men with justice, and do not follow caprice, for it leads you astray from the path of God. Those who stray from the path of God face a terrible punishment for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning.

APPENDIX C
Abdurrauf's Commentary on Q38:17-26

The translation which follows consists of several components:

(1) The text in parentheses represents a rendering into English of the text of the Qur'an. Every effort has been made to allow the text within parentheses to be self-standing, so that it will make sense in its own right if extracted from the broader context of Abdurrauf's commentary.

(2) The text outside the parentheses represents commentary. This is of various kinds:

(a) Phrase-by phrase commentary upon the Qur'an drawn up by Abdurrauf, largely based on the popular Arabic commentary by the Jalalayn.

(b) More discrete exegetical interpolations drawing on a range of commentators. These interpolations have been set apart in the translation which follows under the headings of 'pericope', 'anecdote', and 'clarification'. These interpolations were composed and added to Abdurrauf's commentary by his student, Da'ud Rumi.

English Translation

17. (Endure with patience) O Muhammad (whatever they say) in taunting you (and relate the story of Our servant), i.e. the Prophet (David who was extraordinary) as an example. (Truly he frequently returned) to the ways which are favoured by Almighty God.

18. (Truly We enabled the mountains to sing praises together with him) and because of him (in the evening and at sunrise).

19. (And) We made (the birds join) with him giving praise – (each one) of the hills and birds expressed continuing praise in obedience (with him).

20. (And We strengthened his kingdom with wisdom and knowledge.)

Some of the commentators say that the kingdom was... each night by thirty thousand men, and We gave him clear signs in all that he did, and We gave him wisdom which extended [from him] to all who sought it.

21. (Have you heard) O Muhammad (the story of the disputants who climbed the walls of the sanctuary) of David's place of prayer?

22. (When they came upon David), i.e. before David (and David was surprised by them. They said: 'Don't be surprised,) O David. We represent (two adversaries who are in dispute and have reached an impasse) between us. (Judge between us in fairness, and do not be unjust, and guide us to the right path.)

23. ('My brother here has ninety-nine wives,[21] while I only have one wife. He said) i.e. the one who had ninety-nine wives said: ('Give her into my care) and I will marry her'. (And he imposed himself upon me in this dispute.')

Pericope

Khazin reports that Ibn 'Abbas said that 'Give her into my care' was actually stated as 'Divorce her so that I can marry her'.[22]

24. In judgement David (said: 'It was wrong for him to demand that your sheep[23] be added to his flock of sheep. Many are those)... (who are unjust one to another; in contrast, those who have faith and do good works are few indeed); there lies therein a sign.

Anecdote

This was a test by God of His prophet David, peace be upon him. There were various accounts of the prophets, peace be upon them, and [also] disagreement among the religious scholars regarding the prophets' accounts and the reason for this test.

Ibn Mas'ud□ related that the sin of God's prophet David was in demanding that another man divorce his wife.

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21 The Qur'an says 'ewes'. Abdurrauf has taken 'wives' from al-Khazin.
22 I.e. Ibn 'Abbas also subscribed to the David and Bathsheba account.
23 The commentator reverts to the Qur'anic text by discussing sheep, not wives.

One version relates that this was obligatory in the religion of the Israelite prophets; however Almighty God did not favour David doing this because He loved the world and had added woman [to man] and they had multiplied with gifts bestowed upon them by Him. So Almighty God sent two angels in the form of two men, and they went up before him in his place of prayer, and David did not recognize the two until the two were before him as he prayed.

One version relates that the two were [the archangels] Gabriel and Michael. When the prophet David had passed judgement between them, he saw one look at his companion and laughing they ascended to Heaven. At that moment the prophet David realised that Almighty God had wished to cleanse him. And God alone knows.

(David realised that We had subjected him to a test) because of his love for the woman.[24] (He begged forgiveness of his Lord and fell upon his knees) and turned back to Almighty God in penitence.

25. (So he was forgiven for this [transgression], and he was nearer to Us) through increasing goodness in the world (and the best placed) in the hereafter.

Clarification

Clarification regarding the differences among the three readers in reading *wa li*. Abu 'Amr and Nafi' agree in reading it *wa li* with an unvowelled *ya'*, while Hafs reads it with a *fatha* on the *ya'*. And God alone knows.

26. (O David! We have made you a Vicegerent in the world) in order to govern over people, (so judge between people with fairness. Do not follow your lusts, otherwise you will be lost from) the signs which show the way to the true faith. (Truly all those who lose) belief in (Almighty God face a terrible punishment for forgetting the day of reckoning) which awaits those who set aside their faith.

24 Confirms al-Khazin's version as the standard.