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## Seerah Discourses in Medieval Christian Account of "The History of Sebeos": A Research Study

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### Abstract

In the Umayyad and Abbasid times, due to expansion of Islamic rule, and conversion of great numbers of non-Muslims to Islam, a number of extra-Islamic accounts about Islam floated at the surface of medieval literary milieu. Among them is "The History of Sebeos", also known as "The History of Heraclius", which hold accounts about Islam and the Holy Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H.).

The scope of this article is to take a glance of statements of the said "History", for which verses from the Bible, and the Holy Qur'an, along with narrations from Ahadith and Seerah literature have been taken as data along with the said writing and studied using an elaborative research methodology. The statements regarding the Seerah of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) have been analyzed in the light of classical Seerah sources, to search and elaborate the authenticity and validity of the discourses of the said writing. The article ends with the conclusion that the statements and discourses about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) described in the said writing are somewhat in accordance with the Seerah, although having few shadows over the authenticity of it to rely upon solely. While it has been recommended for further research, that, not only similar studies be conducted analyzing other medieval writings, containing statements and discourses about Seerah of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), but also, the methodology, motives and impacts of these writings be elaborated, so that it may be helpful to understand the whole scenario which gave rise to the genre of extra-Islamic Seerah sources, to implement its outcome in present day dialogue with non-Muslims of the world, introducing the Seerah of The Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) to the respective religious communities in an academic way.

**Keywords:** Seerah, discourses, Sebeos, medieval, Christian, polemic, Disputation

## Introduction:

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is very distinctive personality because of His marvelous qualities and traits, being a bliss for all the worlds, and also being one among the mankind who is not only showered with peace and blessings by Allah Almighty (S.W.T.) Himself and His angels, but Allah Almighty (S.W.T.) has commanded the Muslims to do so as well.<sup>1</sup> Because the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) is the center of faith, love, obedience and submission for all believers.

That is why, from the time of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and onwards, the Companions (R.A.) and all the believers who came after them, have made special arrangements to collect and preserve every word, deed and situation related to the Blessed Prophet (P.B.U.H.). Resulting in on the one hand, a great collection of traditions (*Ahadith*) of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), and on the other hand, the events of the blessed life of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) came to the fore in the form of books of biography aka "*Seerat al-Nabi*" (S.A.W.). And traditionally, this collection is the primary source for studying the biography or "*Seerah*" of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.).

However, it is worth mentioning that not only the Muslims have written about the *Seerah* of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), but also the contemporary non-Muslims of the medieval times have expressed their ideas and thoughts in this regard in their various writings which can be termed as "Extra-Islamic *Seerah*" writings, usually considered less than worthy enough to be consulted for *Seerah* Study. Though in modern times, Western scholars and Orientalists have paid a close attention to these writings, in an attempt to portray the biography of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) on the basis of them alone, insisting on their results and outcomes to be accepted as correct. Which makes it necessary to get acquainted with the discourses and statements stated in them, along with analyzing their authenticity, so that the validity of the Orientalist methodology (stated above), be elucidated. Also, the consistency or inconsistency of the accounts stated in these writings with traditional Islamic *Seerah* sources be demonstrated and verified as well.

## Research Methodology:

The qualitative approach is adopted in this analytical and historical study. Quotations from the Holy Qur'an, the Bible, the books of *Ahadith* and *Seerah* have been taken, along with Medieval Christian account of Sebeos. Moreover, some secondary sources were also used where necessary, after careful evaluation and assurance of their validity and reliability, and were referred to them by using "W.R.T." (i.e. with reference to). While "f/n" is used where a "footnote" is referred to. Arabic words are transliterated and italicized, where required. It is essential to elaborate that to comply with the limits of an article, brief references have been quoted, avoiding lengthy discourses. In addition, the academic discussion and consultation with senior scholars and researchers of that specific area were also involved in this study. The case was compared in Islamic and Christian context, and then recommendations were given for its contemporary application, and further research.

## Background:

Europe's history is generally divided into three periods: the ancient civilization of antiquity. The division of the Roman Empire into the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Byzantine Empire, till the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, starting from the fifth century

C.E., this thousand-year period is called as the Middle Ages. The period after the sixteenth century C.E. is generally called as the Modern Age.

While the Roman Empire of the Middle Ages is important and noteworthy due to many other incidents and events, yet, the introduction of Islam and the Holy Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H.) reaching to the Roman emperor Heraclius by a letter in his name,<sup>2</sup> from the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) in the 7th century C.E. was not only a significant affair, but changed the history afterwards forever.

By the time of passing away of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), the whole of Arabia had entered the Islamic realm, after which, during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq and Umar Farooq (R.A.) the regions of the Roman Empire became part of the Islamic State.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these conquests, the non-Muslims residing in these areas interacted with Muslims directly, and due to liberal contact with Muslims, they not only reverted to Islam, but their rate of reverting to Islam also augmented.<sup>4</sup>

One of the effects of the Muslims settling in these areas was that, the non-Muslims who lived close to them, attracted to their way of life, culture and manners, used to convert to Islam.<sup>5</sup> In addition, in the nascent Muslim state, the conquered nations have been granted freedom of action in exchange for *jizya* and loyalty,<sup>6</sup> and, the identical treatment of new Muslims as same as the prior ones, by the Muslim authorities, had also Played an important role for local population to embrace Islam.<sup>7</sup>

But, on the other hand, Islam also raised certain questions about the beliefs of religions followed in conquered populace, which compelled their leaders and followers to adopt a defensive stance, giving rise to a situation where Muslims were arguing for the veracity of their position, but in response, these non-Muslim classes not only refused to acknowledge these facts, but were also quite resistant.<sup>8</sup> Despite the anti-Muslim hatred, the tendency of ordinary Christians to embrace Islamic domination has not diminished. Because, on the one hand, their followers were displeased with the exploitation at the hands of their religious leaders,<sup>9</sup> and secondly, the church's full "rational defense" of their beliefs did not dispel the perception about Muslims, that by abandoning idolatry and polytheism, they have become the favored people of God.<sup>10</sup> So to say that, Islam unexpectedly not only rose religiously and politically, but also gained the impression that it was God's chosen religion. A situation which has been described as:

*"...a new religio-political entity had unexpectedly arisen, achieved dazzling military success and promoted itself as favored by God and in possession of His last dispensation".<sup>11</sup>*

The reformist and direct critique of Christian beliefs by Islamic teachings invoke conversion to Islam in the conquered settlements just like a true depiction of this Qur'anic verse:

﴿وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا﴾<sup>12</sup>

"And you see people entering Allah's (approved) religion in multitudes"

Whom testimony is found in the words of another medieval period writer as:

*"For without blows or torture they slid down in great eagerness ..., forming groups of twenty, thirty and a hundred of men, two and three hundred, without any kind of compulsion to this, they ... became Muslims."<sup>13</sup>*

Against this background, in response to the arrival of Muslims and their dominion, certain writings were surfaced that clearly aimed to respond not only to the growing social and intellectual influence of Islam, but also to protect their vanishing religion.<sup>14</sup> These accounts contain a mix of expressions about Islam, and the prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H.), bearing notions from extremely negative to neutral, up to positive ones. Out of these writings, one such account is "The History of Sebeos", which is discussed below to get acquainted with the *Seerah* discourses described in it.

### **The History of Sebeos:**

This inscription is attributed to a bishop named Sebeos, who is said to be the pastor of the Church of Bagratunis.<sup>15</sup> Although he is believed to be died in 661 C.E., yet nothing else is known about his date and place of birth or death, or other whereabouts.<sup>16</sup> But repeated quotations from the Bible in his accounts suggest that he was a high-ranking religious official, allegedly the bishop of Bagratunik, and a member of church council held in 645<sup>17</sup> at Dvin.<sup>18</sup> Yet Armenian antiquities do not confirm the name of any Bagratunik bishop named Sebeos, as a member of the Council of Dvin, held in 645.<sup>19</sup> However, his name appears to be at 8<sup>th</sup> number on the list of those 17 bishops who have approved twelve canons under Cathalicos Nerses iii,<sup>20</sup> but other than that document, nothing could be confirmed.<sup>21</sup> Rather, his name, in its original form, Eusebios, is found in some text as the name of one of the sons of those pagan priests whom Gregory the Illuminator<sup>22</sup> allegedly appointed bishop of various regions. Moreover, had Sebeos been the same bishop who was a member of the Council of Dvin, he should have mentioned this in his book, which he didn't.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the identification of that well-known Sebeos, and the Sebeos, to whom this History has been attributed, is still an assumption to be settled.<sup>24</sup> However, the name of Seboes was included in the list of Armenian historians, compiled by an early eleventh-century Armenian historian Step'anos Taronets'i, also known as "Asolak."<sup>25</sup> He used the word "Eusebi", which was originally an Armenian abbreviation for the Greek word "Eusebius."<sup>26</sup> This list elaborates that not only a Chronicle named "The History of Heraclius" used to survive at some time, but it was attributed to a bishop named Sebeos as its writer as well.<sup>27</sup> But still he is thought to be a shadowy personality.<sup>28</sup>

However its end points to the fact that it was authored probably none other than this anonymous bishop,<sup>29</sup> which is referred to as the "History of Hercules" by some contemporary commentators also.<sup>30</sup> Some assume that it was written in 655 C.E., and its conclusion was written in about 661 C.E.<sup>31</sup> While some scholars date it to 660 C.E.<sup>32</sup>

This book, attributed to Sebeos, was first published by T'adeos Mihrdatean in Constantinople in 1851 C.E. under the title "History of Bishop Sebeos on Heraclius", although the used manuscript did not contain the title or the author's name.<sup>33</sup> But priorly, the French Orientalist Brosset, quoting the Russian monk Jean Chakhatounof in 1847-48 C.E., expressed the opinion that the above work was indeed "History of Sebeos",<sup>34</sup> preserved in two copies, "Mat 2639" which was used by Mihrdatean for publication in 1851 C.E., while the other relatively old version which dates back to 1568 C.E., but is now missing, so the first version became the source of all copies later on.<sup>35</sup>

The said manuscript had three parts, the first of which is called "The Primary History", and describes the settlement of Armenia by the Armenian ancestor Hayk, while in the second part, The list of Armenian, Greek and Persian kings is given, and the third part deals with the

Armenian history of the sixth to seventh centuries C.E., in addition to the Byzantine-Iranian conflict, the fall of the Sassanid Empire, and the early Muslim conquests, which was quoted later on by Byzantine and Armenian historians, along with Muslim historians as well.<sup>36</sup>

The first (albeit incomplete) translation of the said history was done by Hubschmann in German. Later, in 1904 C.E., Macler translated it into French (both are extinct by now). Then Bedrosian translated it (incompletely) into English, but lacks any explanation.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that the document under study was called an anonymous History till 1828 C.E., and in the Chahkhat'uncan<sup>38</sup> list of 1833 C.E. it was called the pseudo-History of Sebeos<sup>39</sup>, and later on the same attribution was accepted by Brosset despite of having an anonymous version.<sup>40</sup>

In this history, the author has summarized the articles on the overthrow of the Persian and Byzantine empires by the Muslims in the middle of the seventh century C.E., in which he has narrated the events up to the beginning of the Caliphate of Hazrat Amir Mu'awiyah (R.A.).<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that while making verbal traditions a part of his discourse, there seems to be a significant decrease in the inclination and tendency to pay attention to, or using the Biblical verses. But when he narrates the events in his own words, he tends to describe them in accordance with biblical concepts. The style is being more like that of a predictor than a historian, in which he uses quotations from books of Deuteronomy and Daniel as a prelude to Muslim conquests and further destruction due to Christians own sins.<sup>42</sup> Sebeos has limited his work to the raw material he obtained to compile an abstract, using Persian calendar in accordance with Christian calendar. In this regard he has neither manipulated his own sources, nor twisted them to obtain statements of his own accord, nor has he intended to do so.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, if compared with other contemporary histories, the authoritative status of the events described in the said history, increases the value of Sebeos as a historian and a researcher.<sup>44</sup>

In the history under discussion, Islam and its conquests have been mentioned as an emerging political force, whose beliefs and ideologies have been linked to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), but surprisingly not in a derogatory manner.<sup>45</sup> There are presented two possible interpretations of the rise of Islam in this history. One that, few alleged deported Jews made a plan to avenge their deportation with the help of the Ishmaelites, which required the intervention of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) for its fulfillment.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, the Ishmaelites were described as a prologue to the end of the world, comparing them to the "fourth beast" of the book of Daniel.<sup>47</sup> Although it contains several mistakes, yet it deserves attention for being a contemporary writing.<sup>48</sup>

The following account is found about the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) in the said history:

*"At that time<sup>49</sup> a certain man from among those same sons of Ishmael<sup>50</sup> whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses.<sup>51</sup> Muhammad preached, saying, "With an oath God promised that land to Abraham and his posterity after him forever...Now you, you are the sons of Abraham, and God will realize in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham, and none will be able to resist you in battle, for God is with you.<sup>52</sup> He legislated for them not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to commit fornication."<sup>53</sup>*



In the above quotation, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) has been described as an Ishmaelite, corroborating this narration in which the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) introduces Himself as:

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ كِنَانَةَ مِنْ وَلَدِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَاصْطَفَىٰ قُرَيْشًا مِنْ كِنَانَةَ وَاصْطَفَىٰ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ بَنِي هَاشِمٍ وَاصْطَفَانِي مِنْ بَنِي هَاشِمٍ"<sup>54</sup>  
 "Verily Allah granted eminence to *Kinana* from amongst the descendants of Isma'il and he granted eminence to the *Quraish* amongst *Kinana* and he granted eminence to the *Quraish* amongst *Banu Hashim* and he granted me eminence from the tribe of *Banu Hashim*."

And that he was a merchant, a description in accordance with the Holy Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) *Seerah* also.<sup>55</sup> Whereas, Sebeos resonates with the Holy Qur'an while describing the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) as a preacher and the path of truth. As it is clearly stated in the following verses:

﴿إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا﴾<sup>56</sup>

"Surely, We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of good tidings, and a warner."

and ﴿كَذَلِكَ أَرْسَلْنَاكَ فِي أُمَّةٍ﴾<sup>57</sup>

"Thus We have sent you, amidst a community."

and ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا﴾<sup>58</sup>

"O prophet, We have sent you as a witness and as a bearer of good news and a warner, and as the one who calls (people) towards Allah with His permission, and as a luminous lamp."

and ﴿إِنْ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ﴾<sup>59</sup>

"You are not responsible but for conveying the message."

So it is obvious that Allah Almighty has sent the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) all by Himself as a "Bashir", "Nazir" and a "Shahid" for preaching His message." Moreover, it is also stated that:

﴿وَإِنَّكَ لَتَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾<sup>60</sup>

"Surely you are inviting them to a straight path."

and ﴿وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾<sup>61</sup>

"And indeed you are guiding (people) to a straight path."

And this is the straight path beyond any doubt, as stated in the Holy Qur'an:

﴿قُلْ يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ﴾<sup>62</sup>

"Say, O people, the truth has come to you from your Lord."

and ﴿بَلْ جَاءَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾<sup>63</sup>

"No, he has come with Truth and has confirmed all the messengers (of Allah)."

And it is told about this Truth in a clear manner:

﴿الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ﴾<sup>64</sup>

"The truth is from your Lord. So, never be among those who doubt (it)."

The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) has been sent as a preacher to preach the Truth, as it is stated:

﴿أَمَّا عَلَيَّ رَسُولُنَا الْبَلُغُ الْمُبِينُ﴾<sup>65</sup>

"Be assured that the duty of Our Messenger is only to convey the Message clearly."

and ﴿فَأَمَّا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلُغُ الْمُبِينُ﴾<sup>66</sup>

"Your responsibility is only to convey the message clearly."

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the same attributes of Jesus Christ (A.S.) have been described in the Bible as:

*"I am the way, the truth and life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*<sup>67</sup>

So, the above-mentioned attributes of the Holy Prophet(P.B.U.H.) described by Sebeos are found to be in parallel with the Prophet Jesus Christ(A.S.), because they both share a same source of divine Truth, which is described in the Bible as:

*"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth."*<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, like Prophet Jesus (A.S.), the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) was the path of truth without whom; it is not possible to reach unto God. In the same way, it is also described in the said History that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) taught the knowledge of God of Prophet Abraham (A.S.).

﴿قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءُؤُا مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ﴾<sup>69</sup>

"Indeed, there is an excellent example for you in Ibrahim and those with him, when they said to their people; we disown you and what you worship instead of Allah. We disbelieve in you. Enmity and hatred has arisen between us and you forever, unless you believe in Allah alone."

and ﴿وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ ۖ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾<sup>70</sup>

"And (We sent) Ibrahim when he said to his people, Worship Allah and fear Him. That is better for you if you know."

and ﴿إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾<sup>71</sup>

"Surely, Ibrahim was an *Ummah* (a whole community in himself), devoted to Allah, a man of pure faith; and he was not among the *Mushriks* (i.e. those who associate partners with Allah)."

Therefore, Qur'an dispenses the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) as the most suitable person for the heritage of the Abrahamic legacy. As stated:

﴿إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا﴾<sup>72</sup>

"The closest of people to Ibrahim are those who followed him, and this Prophet(P.B.U.H.), and those who believe; and Allah is the Guardian of all believers."

In addition, it is stated in the said history that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) had been given knowledge about the history (biography) of Prophet Moses (A.S.), and as obvious as it is that Prophet Moses (A.S.) is mentioned in several Surahs and verses of the Holy Qur'an.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Sebeos also attributed a statement to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.). In other words, a *hadith* is narrated by him in whom the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) mentioned the promise which God Almighty had originally made to Prophet Abraham (A.S.) as to give the



children of Prophet Abraham (A.S.) a land forever, persuading to launch a campaign to seize the said Promised Land. However, it is noteworthy that there is neither a verse in the Holy Qur'an, or any *hadith* that mentions any "Promised Land" to Prophet Abraham (A.S.), nor did the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) urge His Companions to acquire any land with reference to such a promise with Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.). Even when the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) had been prophesying in His early days of Prophet-hood in *Makkah*, about the conquest of the Arabs and non-Arabs (by His believers), He never mentioned a word about any "Promised Land".<sup>74</sup> Although it is worth noting that in the sermon delivered by the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) on the occasion of the conquest of *Makkah*, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said:

"لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، صَدَقَ وَعْدُهُ، وَنَصَرَ عَبْدُهُ، وَهَزَمَ الْأَخْرَابَ وَحْدَهُ"<sup>75</sup>

"There is no God but Allah, the One. He fulfilled His promise and helped His servant and defeated the armies alone".

But the promise that was mentioned here was the same which is mentioned in this verse of the Holy Qur'an as:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِي فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لَرَادُّكَ إِلَى مَعَادٍ﴾<sup>76</sup>

"Surely the One who has enjoined the Qur'an upon you will surely bring you back to a place of return."

And according to Hazrat Abdullah ibn Abbas (R.A.), "لَرَادُّكَ إِلَى مَعَادٍ" here means *Makkah Mukarramah*.<sup>77</sup> While this promise was made directly to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) Himself, and not to Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.). Still the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) never mentioned *Makkah* as the "Promised Land" ever. However, this "Promised Land" of Canaan (modern day Palestine) had been mentioned in great detail in the Bible, and perhaps Sebeos could be referring to it as well. If true, then it can be deduced that Sebeos or his contemporary writers had some knowledge not only about the "Promised Land", but also the real "promised one" too.

This in fact refers to the promise that God Almighty made to Prophet Abraham (A.S.), mentioned in the Bible as follows:

"I will give unto thee, and thy seed after thee, the land of Canaan; and I will be their God."<sup>78</sup>

"This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised."<sup>79</sup>

"And the uncircumcised man child...that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."<sup>80</sup>

So, after this promise had been fulfilled, Prophet Abraham's (A.S.) act was as follows:

"And Abraham took Ismail his son,...and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him."<sup>81</sup>

"In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son."<sup>82</sup>

By the direction of God Almighty, Abraham (A.S.) took his son Ishmael (A.S.) with Him, and on the same day they were both circumcised marking the fulfillment of God's promise. It is clear from the above verses that when God Almighty promised Abraham (A.S.) to have children and to give the land of Canaan (present-day Palestine) permanently, only Ishmael (A.S.) was his

only child. In order to fulfill the aforesaid promise of Allah, He circumcised himself on the same day that Allah (S.W.T.) had promised Him, even though Ibrahim (A.S.) was 99 years old and Ishmael (A.S.) was 13 years old.<sup>83</sup>

In this regard, Ibrahim Tabarani also admits that the promise made to Prophet Abraham (A.S.) was fulfilled only through Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), when Palestine was conquered at the hands of companions of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) in the reign of Hazrat Umar (R.A.) in 637 C.E.

At the end, Sebeos mentions some of the "rules" laid down by the Holy Prophet, which seem to be a statement of the Qur'anic injunctions, for example, the prohibition of eating carcasses is found in these verses.

﴿إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ﴾<sup>84</sup>

"He has only prohibited for you carrion."

and ﴿حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ﴾<sup>85</sup>

"Prohibited for you are: carrion."

Whereas, the prohibition of wine has been mentioned as:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾<sup>86</sup>

"O you who believe! Wine, gambling, altars and divining arrows are filth, made up by Satan. Therefore, refrain from it, so that you may be successful."

And telling lies has been described as an antonym to the character of a believer:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ﴾<sup>87</sup>

"And those who do not witness falsehood."

While fornication has been strictly forbidden as:

﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّانِيَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾<sup>88</sup>

"Do not even go close to fornication. It is indeed a shameful act, and an evil way to follow."

and ﴿الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ . وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ﴾<sup>89</sup>

"The fornicating woman and the fornicating man, flog each one of them with one hundred stripes. No pity for them should prevail upon you in the matter of Allah's religion, if you really believe in Allah and the Last Day."

## Conclusion:

In the light of the above lines, it can be said that the accounts about the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) stated by Sebeos are consistent with the Holy Qur'an and *Seerah* of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) up to a greater extent. Although there is no unambiguous evidence about the true attribution of the said History to Sebeos, still it reveals that the writer neither seemed to be biased nor had any polemic views against the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.), and such writings can be presented as a supporting document while introducing the *Seerah* of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) to the non-Muslims especially. Moreover, the statement about the "Promised Land"

indicates that contrary to Jewish claims, the land of Palestine had been promised through Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) to Ishmaelites, instead of Israelites, a matter which was not obscure from the medieval writers like Sebeos.

### Recommendations:

The History of Sebeos is an important medieval account which contains information of that time. It is essential that it should be studied thoroughly not only to get familiarized with its literary style, but also to explore and analyze more accounts about Islam and teachings of Islam to be found in it. This research is also essential in a sense that usually those writings are surfaced by the orientalist, contain polemic data in them, portraying Islam and The Holy Prophet of Islam negatively in a derogatory manner, but those writings presenting a positive or at least a neutral picture, are scarcely surfaced. But their research can change the scenario to a greater extent.

Apart from that, a large collection of medieval writings is preserved in the manuscripts of that time, which can be accessed and read directly, but it is necessary to get acquainted with those languages, which hold these relics, in order to avoid getting them from Orientalists second handed. As mentioned above, by studying other medieval and post-medieval Christian and Jewish writings, their discourses, motives, methods and arguments, and comparing them with the style of contemporary non-Muslim accounts, is essential to form a Unified Muslim *Seerah* Literature. In which, keeping in view the writing method and style of non-Muslims, the goal should be to convey a true and real introduction of the "*Seerah*" of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) to every non-Muslim in an academic way.

Another important recommendation to be made is that like Sebeos, some other medieval non-Muslim writers have discussed the issue of the "Promised Land" of Palestine. Those accounts must be accessed and studied thoroughly and carefully to get a clear picture of this issue, presenting an academic perspective about the blazing issue of Palestinian occupation by Israelis.

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<sup>2</sup> Bukhari, Muhammad bin Ismael bin Ibrahim, *al- Jami al-Musnado al- Sahih al-Mukhtasaro min Umoor e Rasulullahi (P.B.U.H.) Sunanihi wa Ayyamihi*, ed.: Zuhair bin Nasir, Dar Towq al-Najah, Beirut, ed.: 1<sup>st</sup>, 1422 A.H., *Kitab al-Wahi, Bab: Swal Harqal an al-Wahi*, Hadith: 6

<sup>3</sup> Sarwat Solat, *Millat e Islamia ki Mukhtasar Tareekh*, Pan-Islamic Publications, Shah Alam Market, Lahore, March 1970, ed.: 2<sup>nd</sup>, Part I, pp. 48, 55-50

<sup>4</sup> Hoyland, Robert G., *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, Darwin Press, Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A., 1997, 2<sup>nd</sup> printing, 2001, p:11-12; and, Hart, Michael H., *The 100 A Ranking of The Influential Persons in History*, Citadel Press Book, 1992, p:7

<sup>5</sup> Coop, Jessica A., *Religious And Cultural Conversion to Islam in Ninth-Century Umayyad Cordoba*, Journal of World History, University of Hawaii Press, Vol.: 4, No: 1, 1993, pp: 49-50

<sup>6</sup> Hitti, Philip K., *Syria A Short History*, The MacMillan Company, New York, U.S.A., 1959, p: 113

<sup>7</sup> Griffith, Sidney H., *The Church in The Shadow of The Mosque*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A., 2008, p:15

<sup>8</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p:19

<sup>9</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp: 23-24

<sup>10</sup> Timothy I, *Syriac Apology*, p: 59,131; W.R.T., Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p: 24

<sup>11</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p: 523

<sup>12</sup> Al-Nasr, 110: 2

<sup>13</sup> Chronicle Zuqnin, p: 385; W.R.T. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p: 343

<sup>14</sup> Griffith, Sidney H., *Melkites, Jacobites and The Christological Controversies in Arabic in Ninth-Century Syria*, in, *Syrian Christians Under Islam The First Thousand Years*, ed.: David Thomas, Brill, Leiden, 2001, p: 4

<sup>15</sup> Arminian territory, situated in the west of present day Azerbaijan and east of Turkey, ruled by Bagratuni Dynasty. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bagratuni Armenia 1000-en.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bagratuni_Armenia_1000-en.svg), accessed: 28-03-2017, 4:03PM)

<sup>16</sup> Tim Greenwood, "*The History of Sebeos*", In, *Christian-Muslim Relations, A Bibliographical History*, ed.: David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, Brill, Netherlands, Vol.: 1, 2009, p: 139

<sup>17</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 139

<sup>18</sup> city in Armenia located at 40° N, 44° 41' E, north of *Artaxata* on the left bank of the Azat (Garnīčāi), about 35 km south of the present Armenian capital at Yerevan. In Old Armenian sources the name of the city is almost always given as Dowin. (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dvin>, accessed: 29-03-2017, 2:24PM).

40.017975N, 44.584113E, (<http://www.latlong.net/c/?lat=40.017975&long=44.584113>, accessed: 29-03-2017, 2:27 PM).

<sup>19</sup> Mahe, 'L' eglise'472; and, Kanonagirk, Hayots, ii, pp: 200-215; W.R.T., R.W. Thomson & James Howard-Johnston, (assisted by: Tim Greenwood), *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos, Part:1, Translated Texts for Historians, Vol:31*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, U.K., 1999, p: xxxiv

<sup>20</sup> An Armenian bishop during the governorship of Amir Mu'awiyah (R.A.) in Syria (641-661 AD), whose name was Shinigh, also known as "Architect". (Hacikjan, Agop J., &et.al., *The Heritage of Arminian Literature*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, U.S.A., 2002, Vol:ii, P: 36

<sup>21</sup> Mahe, 472, WRT., Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxiv

<sup>22</sup> The founder and patron saint of the Armenian Church, known as the "Sun of Armenia", was born in Iran in the time of Khusrau. (Malan, S.C., Rev. M.A., *The Life and Times of S. Gregory The Illuminator*, Rivingtons, Oxford & Cambridge, London, 1808, p: iv, 113-114)

<sup>23</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxiv; and, Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, op.cit. p: 139

<sup>24</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxiv

<sup>25</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxvii

<sup>26</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxvii, f/n: 28

<sup>27</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxvii

<sup>28</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xlii

<sup>29</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 139

<sup>30</sup> Sebeos, *History of the Seventh Century*; and, Arzoumanian, *A Critique of Sebeos and History of Heraclius*; W.R.T., Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp: 124-125.

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- <sup>31</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 144
- <sup>32</sup> Dated Texts, Islamicawearness.org , accessed: 09-03-2017, 4:40PM
- <sup>33</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxi
- <sup>34</sup> Brosset, *Rapports*, pp; 49-55; W.R.T., Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxi
- <sup>35</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxi
- <sup>36</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxiii
- <sup>37</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxiii, f/n: 14
- <sup>38</sup> i.e. edited by Chakhatounof
- <sup>39</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, pp: xxxiii-xxxiv
- <sup>40</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p:xxxiv
- <sup>41</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: xxxviii
- <sup>42</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: 1
- <sup>43</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: lxx
- <sup>44</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: lxxiv
- <sup>45</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 141
- <sup>46</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 141; and, Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: 95, 97, 102
- <sup>47</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, p: 142
- <sup>48</sup> Tim Greenwood, *The History of Sebeos*, pp: 142-143
- <sup>49</sup> Asolik, 112, dates the appearance of Muhammad[ﷺ]to the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Dawit' Saharuni (and) the 68<sup>th</sup> year of the Arminian era, thus 619,620C.E.. (Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p:95, f/n: 591)
- <sup>50</sup> Which Sebeos had previously mentioned in reference to the Jews. (Thomson, *The Arminian History*, p:95)
- <sup>51</sup> Thomson, *The Arminian History Attributed to Sebeos*, p: 95
- <sup>52</sup> Sebeos, xxx, Tr.: Macler, pp: 95-96; W.R.T. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p: 129
- <sup>53</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p: 131
- <sup>54</sup> Muslim, Abu al-Hassan bin al-Hajjaj al-Qushairi, *Al-Jami' al-Sahih*, Dar al-Jil, wa Dar al-Afaq al-Jadeedah, Beirut, *Kitab al-Fadail, Bab: Fadle Nasab al-Nabi (S.A.W.) wa Taslim al-Hajari 'Alaihi Qabal al-Nubuwwati, Hadith: 6077*
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- <sup>56</sup> Al-Baqarah, 2: 119; Fatir, 35: 24
- <sup>57</sup> Al-Ra'ad, 13: 30
- <sup>58</sup> Al-ahzab, 33: 45-46
- <sup>59</sup> Al-Shura, 42: 48
- <sup>60</sup> Al-Muminun, 23: 73

- <sup>61</sup> Al-Shura, 42: 52  
<sup>62</sup> Yunus, 10: 108  
<sup>63</sup> Al-Saffaat, 37: 37  
<sup>64</sup> Al-Baqarah, 2: 147  
<sup>65</sup> Al-Ma'idah, 5: 92; Al-Taghabun, 64: 16  
<sup>66</sup> AL-Nahal, 16: 82  
<sup>67</sup> John, 14:6  
<sup>68</sup> Psalms, 25: 10  
<sup>69</sup> Al-Mumtahinah, 60: 4  
<sup>70</sup> Al-'Ankabut, 29: 16  
<sup>71</sup> AL-Nahal, 16: 120  
<sup>72</sup> Aal e Imran, 3: 68  
<sup>73</sup> Specially Surahs Taha and Qasas describe the biography of the Prophet Musa (AS) at length, along with other places in the Holy Qur'an.  
<sup>74</sup> Ibn e Ishaq, *al-Siyero wal Maghazi*, vol.: 1, p: 236  
<sup>75</sup> Ibn e Hisham, *al-Seerat al-Nabwiyyah*, vol.: 2, p: 412  
<sup>76</sup> Al-Qasas, 28: 85  
<sup>77</sup> Bukhari, *Kitab al-Tafsir al-qur'an*, Bab: *اَنَّ الَّذِي فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ* al-aayah, hadith: 4400  
<sup>78</sup> Genesis, 17: 7  
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<sup>80</sup> Genesis, 17: 14  
<sup>81</sup> Genesis, 17: 23  
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<sup>85</sup> Al-Ma'idah, 5: 3  
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