

# **THE QUR'AN**

## **(A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC)**

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#### INTRODUCTION:

Normally when one begins any research into the Qur'an, the first question which should be asked is how we know that it is what it claims to be, the final word of God? In order to answer that question we would need to go to the sources of the Qur'an to ascertain its authenticity.

As you well know, going to the sources of the Qur'an is much more difficult than one would usually assume, as we have so little data with which to use. In my other papers (The problems with Sources of Islam and Is the Qur'an the Word of God?) I dealt with the problems which exist when confronted by the dearth of material on the sources of the Qur'an, so I won't repeat those arguments here.

Suffice it to say, that the only real source we have for the Qur'an is the book itself, and what Muslim Traditions tell us concerning how that book came to be created (that which Muslims consider to be historical, taken from Muslim sources). Because of their late compilations (200-300 years after the event), and the contradicting documentation which we now possess prior to 750 A.D., I find it difficult to consider either of them as valid or authentic as source material.

However, since we are attempting to compare the Qur'an with our own scriptures, I will, for the time being, set aside my prejudices and assume for arguments sake that the traditions are correct. In other words, I will take the position of current orthodox Muslim scholarship and presume that the Qur'an was compiled in the years 646-650 A.D., under the auspices of the caliph Uthman, from material which originated with the man Muhammad before his death in 632 A.D.

It is from this premise that I will attempt to respond to the question of whether the Qur'an can claim to be the final and most perfect revelation of God's word to humanity.

## **THE AUTHORITY FOR THE QUR'AN**

The Arabic word *Qur'an* is derived from the root *qara'a*, which means "to read" or "to recite." This was the command which the angel Gabriel supposedly asked Muhammad three times to do when he confronted him in July or August 610 A.D. in the *Hira* cave, situated three miles north-east of Mecca (Mishkat IV p.354).

According to Muslims the Qur'an is the final revelation from Allah. In Arabic the Qur'an is also referred to as *Al-Kitab* (the book), *Al-furqan* (the distinction), *Al-mas'haf* (the scroll), and *Al-dhikr* (the warning), as well as other names.

For those who like statistics, you may be interested to know that the Qur'an consists of 114 chapters (*suras*), made up of 30 parts, 6,616 verses (*ayas*), 77,943 words, and 338,606 letters (Mishkat III, p.663). According to Islamic scholars 86 of the suras were revealed in Mecca, while 28 suras were revealed at Medina. Yet, as portions of some suras were recited in both places, you will continue to find a few of the scholars still debating the origins for a number of them. The suras vary in length and are known by a name or title, which are taken from the general theme of that sura, or a particular subject, person or event mentioned in it. This theme may not necessarily appear at the beginning of the sura, however.

Each verse or portion of the sura is known as an *aya*, which means "miracle" in Arabic. Muhammad claimed that the Qur'an was his sole miracle, though the Qur'an did not exist in its written form during his lifetime. In fact much of the controversy concerning the chronology of the Qur'an can be blamed on the fact that he was not around to verify its final collation (Cook 1983:67). But more about that later. To begin with, let's start with the question of revelation; how does Islam understand this concept, and could its view on it be one of the reasons we don't see eye-to-eye concerning our two scriptures?

## **[A] THE REVELATION OF THE QUR'AN:**

Islam, like Christianity, believes that God (Allah) desires to communicate with humanity. But, unlike Christianity, Islam tells us that Allah is remote, so he must not reveal himself to humanity at a personal level. It is for that reason that Allah is forced to employ appointed prophets, who are known as, *rasul*, meaning "the sent one." These prophets are mere humans and so finite, though they are given a special status, and consequently protected by God.

Because Allah is so transcendent and unapproachable, revelation in Islam is simply one-way: from God to humanity, via the prophets. While each prophet supposedly fulfilled his mission by producing a book, the final revelation, and therefore the most important, according to Muslims, is that given to the final prophet Muhammad: the Qur'an.

The Qur'an, Muslims believe, is an exact word-for-word copy of God's final revelation, which are found on the original tablets that have always existed in heaven. Muslims point to sura 85:21-22 which says "*Nay this is a glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a tablet preserved.*" Islamic scholars contend that this passage refers to the tablets which were never created. They believe that the Qur'an is an absolutely identical copy of the eternal heavenly book, even so far as the punctuation, titles and divisions of chapters is concerned (why modern translations still can't agree what those divisions are is evident when trying to refer to an aya for comparison between one version and another).

According to Muslim tradition, these 'revelations' were sent down (*Tanzil* or *Nazil*) (sura 17:85), to the lowest of the seven heavens at the time of the month of Ramadan, during the night of power or destiny (*lailat al*

*Qadr*) (Pfander, 1910:262). From there it was revealed to Muhammad in installments, as need arose, via the angel Gabriel (sura 25:32). Consequently, every letter and every word is free from any human influence, which gives the Qur'an an aura of authority, even holiness, and must be revered as such.

Left unsaid is the glaring irony that the claim for *nazil* revelation of the Qur'an, comes from one source alone, the man to which it was supposedly revealed, Muhammad. There are no outside witnesses before or at the time who can corroborate Muhammad's testimony; nor are miracles provided to substantiate his claims.

In fact, the evidences for the authority of God's revelation, which the Bible emphatically produces are completely absent in the Qur'an, namely:

1) that the revelation of God must speak in the name of God, *Yahweh* (Exodus 3:1-15; the New Testament equivalent is also "I am," John 8:58)

2) that the message must conform to revelation which has gone before (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35; and Revelation 22:18-20)

3) that it must make predictions which are verifiable (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 43:9; and John 13:18-21)

4) that the revelation must be accompanied by signs and wonders in order to give it authority as having come from God (Exodus 10:1-2; Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 41:21-24; and John 7:20-23). Because these are missing in the case of the prophet Muhammad and of the Qur'an, for those of us who are Christians, it seems indeed that it is the Qur'an and not the Bible which turns out to be the most human of documents.

Yet, Muslims continue to believe that the exact Arabic words which we find in the Qur'an are those which exist eternally on the original stone tablets, in heaven. This, according to them, makes the Qur'an of ultimate importance as it derives from the "Mother of books" (refer to sura 43:3-4). Muslims believe there is no other book or revelation which can compare. In fact, in both suras 2:23 and 10:37-38 we find the challenge to, "Present some other book of equal beauty," (a challenge which we will deal with later).

This final revelation, according to Islam, is transcendent, and consequently, beyond the capacity for conjecture, or criticism. What this means is that the Qur'an which we possess today is and has always been final and pure, which prohibits any possibility for verification or falsification of the text.

Because Allah is revered much as a master is to a slave, so his word is to be revered likewise. One does not question its pronouncements any more than one would question a master's pronouncements.

What then are we to do with the problems which do exist in the Qur'an? If it is such a transcendent book, as Muslims claim, then it should stand up to any criticism. Yet, what are we to do with the many contradictions, the factual errors and bizarre claims it makes? Furthermore, when we look more carefully at the text that we have in our possession today, which is supposedly that of Uthman's final codification of the Qur'an, compiled by *Zaid ibn Thabit*, from a copy of *Hafsah's* manuscript, we are puzzled by the differences between it and the four co-existing codices of *Abdullah Masoud*, *Abu Musa*, and *Ubayy*, all of which have deviations and deletions between them.

Another problem concerns its very pronouncements. Because of its seeming transcendency we may not question its content, much of which, according to Muslim Tradition, originates from the later Medinan period of Muhammad's life (the last 10 years, between 622-632 AD), and so consists of basic rules and regulations for social, economical, and political structures, many of which have been borrowed from existing legal traditions of the Byzantine and Persian cultures, leaving us with a seventh-ninth century document which has not been easily adapted to the twentieth century.

#### **Four forms of Biblical Revelation:**

As Christians, this question is important. The Bible, by contrast is not simply a book of rigid rules and regulations which takes a particular historical context and absolutizes it for all ages and all peoples. Instead, we find in the Bible broad principles with which we can apply to each age and each culture (such as worship styles, music, dress, all of which can and are being contextualized in the variety of cultures which the church finds itself today).

As a result the Bible is much more adaptable and constructive for our societies. Since we do not have a concept of *Nazil* (or *tanzil*) revelation, we have no fear of delving into and trying to understand the context of

what the author was trying to say (the process of historical and philological analysis commonly used when translating texts of antiquity). But one would expect such from a revelation provided by a personal God who intended to be actively involved in the transmission of His revelation.

**This, I feel is the crux of the problem between Islam's and Christianity's views on revelation.**

Christians believe that God is interested in revealing Himself to His creation. Since the time of creation He has continued to do so in various ways, namely four.

1) His beauty, power and intricate wisdom is displayed in the sophistication of the universe all around us, so that humanity cannot say that they have never known God. That is what some theologians like to call “**general revelation.**”

2) But God also chooses to reveal Himself more specifically; what those same scholars call “**special revelation.**” This He does by means of prophets, who are sent with a specific word for a specific time, a specific place, and a specific people. Unfortunately, much of what was revealed to those people was quickly forgotten. The human mind has a remarkable capacity to be completely independent of God, and will only take the time to think of Him (if at all) when they are in a crisis, or near to death.

Therefore, God saw the plight of His creation and in His love and compassion for His creation, decided to do something about it.

3) God decided to reveal Himself directly, without any intervening agent to His creation. He did this also to correct that relationship which had been broken with humanity at the very beginning, in the garden of Eden. This is consistent with a God who is personally involved with His creation.

Simply speaking, God Himself came to reveal Himself to humanity; what we might call “**personal revelation.**” He took upon Himself the form of a human, spoke our language, used our forms of expression, and became an example of His truth to those who were His witnesses, so that we who are finite and human would better understand Him who is infinite and divine and beyond all human understanding.

As we read in Hebrews 1:1-2

*God, who at various times and in diverse ways spoke in past times to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds.*

In Jesus Christ we see God perfectly revealed to humanity. This goes beyond special revelation. This is revelation personified!

The Bible, therefore, introduces the world to Jesus Christ. It is, for all practical purposes, a secondary revelation. It is simply the witness to the revelation of God. The Bible tells us about His life, mentioning what He said and did, and then expounds these teachings for the world today. It is merely a book which points to a person. Therefore, we can use the book to learn about the person, but ultimately, we will need to go to the final revelation, Jesus Himself to truly understand who God is.

4) And here is where revelation becomes specific for us today, because God did not simply stop revealing Himself with Jesus Christ. He still desires to be in relationship with His creation, and has continued to reveal Himself in an incarnational way. His “**ongoing revelation**” continues from that time right up until the present as He reveals Himself by means of Himself, the Holy Spirit, the comforter, convicting us of guilt in regard to sin, guiding us into all truth, telling us what is yet to come, and bringing glory to Jesus (John 16:7-15).

Jesus is the true revelation. We find out about Him in the Bible. Yet, that is not all, for the Holy Spirit continues to make Him known to us even today, and that is why the scriptures become alive and meaningful for us.

For Muslims this must sound confusing, and possibly threatening, as it brings God's infinite revelation down from its transcendent pedestal, and presents it within the context of finite humanity. Perhaps to better explain this truth to them we may want to change tactics somewhat. Instead of comparing the Qur'an with the Bible, as most apologists tend to do, it might be helpful to compare the Qur'an with Jesus, as they are both considered to be the Word of God, and stand as God's true and primary revelation to humanity.

The Bible (especially the New Testament), consequently, is the testimony of Jesus's companions, testifying about what He said and did. It is secondary revelation. To take this a step further, we could possibly compare the Bible with their Muslim literary traditions; the *Hadith*, or the *Tarikh*, the *Sira* of the prophet and the *Tafsir*, all of which comment upon the history and teachings of the prophet and the Qur'an. While this may help us explain the Bible to a Muslim we must be careful to underline that though the New Testament speaks mostly about what Jesus said, about His message, it has little to say concerning how He lived. On the other hand the traditions such as the Hadiths and such talk primarily about the life of Muhammad, what he did, with here and there interpretations of what he said.

In this light there is no comparison between the two primary revelations, Jesus and the Qur'an. The Qur'an, a mere book with all its faults and inadequacies, its very authenticity weakly resting on the shoulders of one finite man, who himself has few credentials as a prophet, is no match against Jesus, the man, revered by Muslims and Christians alike as sinless, who, according to His sinless Word is God Himself, and therefore, the perfect revelation.

It may be helpful to use this argument to introduce Jesus to a Muslim, rather than begin with His deity, as it explains the purpose of Jesus before attempting to define who He is; in other words it explains the **why** before the **how**.

### **[B] THE INSPIRATION OF THE QUR'AN:**

That then leads us into the question of inspiration. We have already said that God (or Allah) requires agents in the form of prophets to communicate his truth to his creation. Yet how does Allah communicate his thoughts and will to these prophets? How is revelation carried out?

The Arabic term which best explains the process of revelation is the word *Wahy*, which can mean 'divine inspiration.' According to the Qur'an the primary aim of *Wahy* is two fold: 1) to prove Muhammad's call to prophet-hood (according to suras 13:30 and 34:50), and 2) to give him authority to warn people (according to sura 6:19). In other words, to give himself and his message authority. Concerning the inspiration of the previous prophets, we are told very little.

In sura 42:51 we find *wahy* explained as such:

*It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a Messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills, for He is most high, most wise.*

According to the above sura there are three methods by which Allah communicates to his creation: 1) by direct inspiration, 2) from behind a veil, and 3) through a messenger (the implication is that of an angelic being).

Since the Qur'an tells us little concerning how Muhammad received his revelations, we refer to those who compiled the *Sira* of the prophet, men like Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Athir, and the Turkish writer Ali Halabi to get a clearer insight. Their writings list seven forms of the experience of *Wahy* by Muhammad, some of which are quite revealing:

1) While the *Wahy* (inspiration) lasted, according to Muhammad's wife Aisha, there were the sounds of bells ringing as he sweated profusely. He would become greatly perturbed and his face would change (Mishkat IV, p.359). Muslim Tradition tells us that sometimes he would shiver and swoon, his mouth would foam, and he would roar like a camel (Pfander 1910:345). At other times when the inspiration descended there was the sound near his face like the buzzing of bees (from Umar ibnu'l Khattab and the Mir'at I Kainat, vol.1,p.411), while at other times he felt a tremendous headache (from Abu Hurairah). Many times it seemed to his friends that he swooned and looked like someone intoxicated (from Ali Halabi's Insanu'l Uyun).

2) *Wahy* came to him in dreams.

3) Inspiration also came to him in visions while he was awake.

4) At times he saw an angel in the form of a young man (Mishkat, p.514).

5) At other times he saw angels in angelic form (sura 42:51).

6) During one evening (known as the *Mi'raj*) he was raptured through the 7 heavens (according to the Hadith, Muhammad was taken to the highest heaven where he received the command to pray five times a day).

7) Allah spoke to him from behind a veil (sura 42:51).

When we look at all these examples of inspiration a picture begins to form of a man who either had a vivid imagination, or was possessed, or suffered from a disease such as epilepsy. Muhammad, according to `Amr ibn Sharhabil, mentioned to his wife Khadijah that he feared he was possessed by demons and wondered whether others might consider him possessed by jinn (Pfander 1910:345).

Even during his childhood Muhammad was afflicted with similar problems, causing concern to his friends who felt he had “become afflicted” (Pfander 1910:347).

Anyone acquainted with occult phenomena would be aware of the conditions of those who participate in séances. Occult phenomena in childhood, daydreams, the hearing of voices and calls, nightly meditations, excessive perspiration during trances and the subsequent exhaustion and swoon-like condition; as well as the ringing of bells are quite common. Even the intoxicated condition resembles someone who is in a reasonably deep trance.

Also revealing is the report by Al Waqidi that Muhammad had such an aversion to the form of the cross that he would break everything brought into the house with a shape of the cross on it (Nehls 1990:61).

What we must ask is whether these manifestations point to true occurrences of inspiration, or whether they were simply a disease, or a condition of demonization? Historians inform us that certain great men (many of whom tended to be great warriors, such as Julius Caesar, the great Roman general, as well as the emperor Peter the Great of Russia, and Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor), all exhibited the same symptoms mentioned above (Pfander 1910:347). But none of them claimed to be prophets or apostles of God, nor did their followers offer them such status.

While we want to be careful not to revel in trivial speculation, we must remember that the above statements concerning Muhammad’s condition did not originate from sources outside of Islam. These were statements by his friends and relatives, and those who most firmly believed in his claim to be the seal of the prophets. I am not an expert on these matters, so I leave it to you to decide whether the facts which we have learned concerning the condition of Muhammad at the time he received his revelations can lead us to the conclusion that what he received were truly inspired.

## **[C] THE QUR'AN'S SUPPOSED DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES:**

Moving on, we now tackle the book itself, and ask whether its supposed qualities give it the right to claim a unique position alongside those of the previous scriptures.

### **[1] Its holiness:**

While Muslims hold a high view for all Scriptures, including the Old and New Testaments, they demand a unique and supreme position for the Qur'an, claiming its ascendancy over all other scriptures, because, according to them, “initially, it was never written down by men and so was never tainted with men’s thoughts or styles.” As we mentioned earlier, it is often referred to as the “Mother of Books” (taken from sura 43:3).

Since the Qur'an is such a highly honoured book, it therefore is treated as if it, in itself, is holy. To enquire into its source is considered blasphemy. In most mosques which I have attended, no one would be permitted to let their Qur'an touch the floor. Instead, every individual was urged to use ornately decorated book-stands to rest their Qur'an on while reading from its contents. My Muslim friends were horrified to learn that Christians not only stacked Bibles alongside other lesser books, but that they wrote notes in the margins as well.

The function of the Qur'an, then, seems to be in opposition to that of the Bible. This points out another clear distinction between how the two faiths view revelation.

Take the example of an old man I met in a Pennsylvania mosque, who was highly revered due to his ability to quote, by memory, any passage from the Qur'an (and thus had the title of *Hafiz*). Yet, I never saw him lead any discussions on the Qur'an. A young Saudi Arabian man was given that responsibility. When I asked, "Why?" I was told that the old gentleman didn't understand Arabic well (memorizing thus doesn't command understanding).

It shocked me to find a man who had spent years memorizing the Qur'an, yet had no yearning to understand the content of its message. Is it no wonder, then, that Muslims find little desire to translate their most holy book? Merit is found in the rote reading of the Qur'an in Arabic, and not in its message.

Another example is that of a friend of mine in London who considered the Qur'an the epitome of beauty, and offered me certain suras as examples. Yet, when I asked him to translate the texts he could not.

Some of the Muslim students at the university I attend who could quote certain passages, admired the beauty of the text, but had great difficulty in explaining the meaning. I found it disconcerting that the "beauty of the Qur'an" had such an influence, yet its "beauty" seemed, in fact, to discourage its understanding, as it would become an enemy to its mystique.

Here then is the key which points to the difference between the scriptures of the Christians and that of the Muslims. **The fact that Muslims accord the Qur'an a place of reverence and worship, while memorizing its passages without necessarily understanding it, sparks of idolatry, the very sin (*Shirk*) which the Qur'an itself warns against (suras 4:48; 5:75-76; 41:6), as it elevates an object to the same level of reverence as Allah.**

In much of the Muslim world leather amulets worn on the body are sold outside the mosques (sometimes called *Giri-giri*). Within these amulets one can find folded pieces of paper with an *aya*, or verse from the Qur'an written on them. These verses supposedly have power to ward off evil spirits and diseases. For these Muslims the very letters of the Qur'an are imbued with supernatural power.

Christianity stands against this view of God's written word. We believe that the power and authority for the scriptures comes not from the paper it is written on, but from the words it expresses. We believe that the Bible is merely the testimony of God's revelation to humanity, and so is not holy in and of itself. It is a text which must be read and studied, much as a textbook is read and studied in school. Therefore, its importance lies in its content, rather than in its physical pages, just as a newspaper is read and thrown away, though the news it holds may remain imprinted on the readers mind for years to come.

Perhaps, the criticism by Muslims that Christians abuse the Bible is a result of this misunderstanding of its purpose. Once we understand the significance of the scriptures as nothing more than a repository of God's word, we can then understand why Christians feel no injunction against writing in its margins, or against laying it on the floor (though most of the Christians I know would not do so out of respect for its message).

The high regard for the Qur'an carries over into other areas as well, some of which need to be discussed at this time.

## **[2] Its superior Style:**

Many Muslims claim that the superiority of the Qur'an over all other revelations is due to its sophisticated literary style. They quote suras 10:37-38, or 2:23, or 17:88, which say:

*Will they say >Muhammad hath forged it? Answer: >Bring therefore a chapter like unto it, and call whom ye may to your assistance, besides Allah, if ye speak truth.*

This boast is echoed in the *Hadith* (Mishkat III, pg.664), which says:

*The Qur'an is the greatest wonder among the wonders of the world... This book is second to none in the world according to the unanimous decision of the learned men in points of diction, style, rhetoric, thoughts and soundness of laws and regulations to shape the destinies of mankind.*



Muslims conclude that since there is no literary equivalent in existence, this proves that the Qur'an is a miracle sent down from God, and not simply written by any one man.

Ironically, we now know that many stories and passages in the Qur'an were borrowed, sometimes word-for-word, at other times idea-for-idea from second century apocryphal documents of Jewish and Zoroastrian origin (to be discussed later in this paper). Can Muslim scholars be so easily duped that they would claim divine origins for that which has proved to be quite finite and, indeed, quite human?

It seems so.

To support this elevated belief in their scripture, many Muslim Qur'anic translators have an inclination to clothe their translations in a style that is rather archaic and "wordy," so that the average person must run to the dictionary to enquire their meanings. Yet, these translations were not conceived hundreds of years ago. This may be a ploy by the translators to give the text an appearance of dignity and age which, they hope, will in turn inspire trustworthiness. Or perhaps they hope that it will preserve the form of the text, since form takes priority over content for a Muslim.

In response, we must begin by asking whether the Qur'an can be considered a miracle written by one man, when we know from Muslim Tradition that the Qur'an which we have today was not written by Muhammad but was collated and then copied by a group of men who, fourteen to twenty years after the fact, took what they found from the memory of others, as well as verses which had been written on bones, leaves and stones and then burned all evidence of any other copies (Mishkat III:664; to be taken up later). Where is the miracle in that?

More current research is now eradicating even this theory. According to the latest data, the Qur'an was not a document which was even given to Muhammad. Much of what is included in the Qur'an were additions which slowly evolved over a period of 150-200 years, until they were made a canon sometime in the eighth or ninth century (see paper on the debate: Is the Qur'an the Word of God?). If this is true, and it looks to be the best theory which we have to date, then the authority for the Qur'an as a miracle sent down from heaven is indeed very slim.

But, for the sake of argument, let's ask whether the Qur'an can be considered unique in its style and makeup.

The logic of the claim to its uniqueness, according to Dr. Anis Shorrosh, is spurious as "*it no more proves its inspiration than a man's strength demonstrates his wisdom, or a woman's beauty, her virtue. Only by its teachings, its principles, and content can a book be judged rightly; not by its eloquence, elegance, or poetic strength*" (Shorrosh 1988:192).

Furthermore, one must ask what criteria are used for measuring one literary piece against the other. In every written language there must be a "best piece" of literature. Take for examples the: Rig-Veda of India (1,000-1,500 B.C.), or the eloquent poems in Greek, the Odyssey and the Iliad by Homer, or the Gilgamesh Epic, the Code of Hammurabi, and the Book of the Dead from Egypt, all which are considered classic masterpieces, and all of which predate the Qur'an? Are they any better or worse than the Qur'an?

Closer to home: would we compare Shakespeare's works against that of the Qur'an? No! They are completely different genres. Yet, while few people today dispute the claim that Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are the best written in the English language, no-one would claim they were therefore divine.

To show the futility of such an argument, it would not take a very brilliant person to quote from classical pieces of literature to rebut this claim. They could use such examples as the prayer written by Francis of Assisi (from the 12th century), or the prayer of Thomas Aquinas (in the 13th century), or portions of our own scripture, such as the 23rd Psalm and other Psalms, or even point to the imagery found in the gospel of John, or the theological sophistication evidenced in the letter to the Romans, or the chapter on Love in I Corinthians 13. These could all make the claim to be superior to the Qur'an, and some of them definitely are, but that is not the point. We know the authors of each of these pieces of literature, humble men all; men who would shudder if we would consider their writings somehow elevated to that of the divine.

To make this distinction clearer, compare the Suras below with the passages suggested:

a) sura 76:29-30 (or sura 16:93) versus I Timothy 2:4, Luke 15:3-4, John 10:14,18.

- b) sura 111 versus Francis of Assisi's prayer (see Nehls, Christians Ask Muslims, 1987, pg.75, no.11)
- c) suras 4:74,84; 5:33; 48:16-17 versus Matthew 5:3-12.
- d) sura 109 versus Psalm 23.
- e) sura 24:2 versus John 8:3-12.
- f) suras 2:222-223; 4:11,24,34,176 versus Ephesians 5:22-25.
- g) sura 9:29 versus I Corinthians 13:4-7.
- h) sura 33:53, 56-57 versus Matthew 20:25-28.
- i) suras 55:46-60; 56:22-26,35-38 versus Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27; 22:1-6.

You may feel that the selection of the suras has been unfavorable in contrast to the quotations from the Bible and the prayer, and you are correct. But you must remember that the challenge of the Qur'an is to "produce a chapter like it" (Suras 2:23; 9:16; 10:38; and 17:89). A chapter would pertain to any chapter, and certainly, as I have done here, it is only fair to choose those chapters which are similar in kind and content.

I am aware that the reverse could be done, that Biblical texts could be taken and opposed in similar fashion; but for what purpose? Christians make no claim, as do Muslims, that the Bible is superior to all pieces of literature. It is quite evident that many statements and events described in the Bible are historical records, including quotations uttered by opponents of God which do not necessarily reflect the consent, thought and will of God (i.e. Genesis 38; 2 Samuel 11; 2 Kings 18:27; or Zechariah 9:6). Taken out of context such texts can and frequently are abused to support just about any view or opinion.

Our intent in this section is to consider whether indeed the Qur'an is superior or unique among the scriptures which claim to come from God. To do this it is imperative that we initially understand why scriptures are written and sent down. Scriptures are nothing more than books, written by finite men, whose contents contain revelations from an infinite God. Therefore, they include stories, as well as divine sayings and beliefs. If we were to compare between one scripture and another, the criteria we must use is not whether one particular scripture speaks uniquely to one set of people, in one particular language, at one particular time, but whether the contents of that scripture reveals the true heart of God to all His creation, irrespective of language, race or period in history. If we were to offer the Arabic scripture (the Qur'an), to a Muslim audience (who have always held the book with enormous reverence) they will always consider it superior to any other scripture, irregardless of whether faults and inadequacies in its content can be pointed out. Is it no wonder then, that many Muslims find it so difficult to understand how and why the Qur'an can be translated acceptably? The Bible, on-the-other-hand, is readily understood and appreciated in any language, irregardless of who the reader is or what period of time it is read. The message of the Bible provides its popularity, not its style. Thus, it is the content of each revelation and not its style which must be measured one against the other. From what we now know, we then must decide which scripture can claim to be superior or unique. After all, it was for people like us that the scripture was sent.

### **[3] Its Literary Qualities:**

But what about the Qur'an's supposed literary qualities?

While Christian or secular Arabic speakers are likely to appreciate the Qur'an's poetic qualities, when anyone who is familiar with the Bible picks up a Qur'an and begins to read it through, there is the immediate recognition that he or she is dealing with an entirely different kind of literature from that found in the Bible.

Whereas the Bible contains much historical narrative, the Qur'an contains very little. Whereas the Bible goes out of its way to explain unfamiliar terminology or territory, the Qur'an remains silent. In fact, the very structure of the Bible, consisting of a library of 66 books, written over a period of 1,500 years, reveals that it is ordered according to chronology, subject and theme.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, reads more like a jumbled and confused collection of statements and ideas, interposed many times with little relationship to the preceding chapters and verses. Many scholars admit that it is so haphazard in its make-up that it requires the utmost sense of duty for anyone to plow through it!

The German secular scholar Salomon Reinach in his rather harsh analysis states that:

*From the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit. Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and coherence strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time in absorbing it (Reinach 1932:176).*

In a similar vein, McClintock and Strong's encyclopaedia maintains that:

*The matter of the [Koran] is exceedingly incoherent and sententious, the book evidently being without any logical order of thought either as a whole or in its parts. This agrees with the desultory and incidental manner in which it is said to have been delivered (McClintock and Strong 1981:151).*

Even the former Muslim scholar Dashti laments the literary defects of the Qur'an, saying, *Unfortunately the Qur'an was badly edited and its contents are very obtusely arranged.*" He concludes that, *"All students of the Qur'an wonder why the editors did not use the natural and logical method of ordering by date of revelation, as in Ali ibn Taleb's lost copy of the text (Dashti 1985:28).*

When reading a Qur'an, you will discover that the 114 suras not only have odd names for titles (such as the Cow, the Spoils, the Bee, or the Cave), but their layout is not at all in a chronological order. Size or length had more to do with the sequence of the suras than any other factor, starting with the longer suras and ending with the shortest. Even within the suras we find a mixed chronology (Nehls 1990:48). At times there is a mixture of Meccan and Medinan revelations within the same sura, so that even size is not an infallible guide in dating them.

Another problem is that of repetition. The Qur'an was intended to be memorized by those who were illiterate and uneducated since they could not read it. It therefore engages in the principal of endless repetition of the same material over and over again (Morey 1992:113). This all leads to a good bit of confusion for the novice reader, and gives rise to much suspicion concerning its vaunted literary qualities.

In contrast to the Bible, which was written over several hundred years by a variety of authors, and flows easily from the creation of the world right through to the prophecies concerning the end of the universe; the Qur'an, supposedly written by just one man, Muhammad, during a span of a mere 20 years, seems to go nowhere and say little outside of the personal and political affairs of himself and his companions at one particular time in history (Nehls 1987:41).

With no logical connection from one sura to the next, one is left with a feeling of incompleteness, waiting for the story to give some meaning. Is it no wonder then that so many people today find it difficult to take seriously the claim by the Hadith compilers that the Qur'an is *"a book second to none in the world,"* worthy of divine inspiration (Mishkat III, p.664)?

#### **[4] Its Pure Arabic**

Muslims believe that the Arabic language is the language of Allah. They also believe that the Qur'an, because it is perfect, is the exact representation of Allah's words (sura 10:37). For that reason only the Arabic Qur'an can be considered as authoritative. It, therefore, follows that those who do not know Arabic are required to read and memorize the Qur'an in the Arabic language, as translations can never replace the language of Allah (suras 12:2; 13:37; 41:41,44).

What then are we to do with the previous scriptures, the *Taurat* and *Injil* which were originally written in Hebrew and Greek? Did God relate those revelations in Arabic, and then somehow had them translated into the language the Jews and Christians could understand? Of course not. Language is a human invention, created over time by groups of people to communicate ideas and to pass on information. God is not dependent on our finite human languages. The only time He needs them is when He communicates directly or via an intermediary to us, His creation. However, it is our language He uses to communicate. Thus He used Hebrew and Aramaic to communicate to the Jews. When He incarnated Himself as Jesus Christ, He spoke Aramaic

(and must have known Greek as well, as He spoke to the centurion and the Samaritan woman in a language they could understand). But the New Testament writers chose to write what He said and did in *Koinanea* Greek, for no other reason, than that was the *lingua franca* (and thus the trade language) for the greatest percent of the population living at that time.

Yet, what about the Qur'an which we have today? Is it the pure Arabic document which Muslims claim it to be? The answer is unequivocally "NO!" There are many foreign words or phrases which are employed in the Qur'an, some of which have no Arabic equivalent, and others which do.

Arthur Jeffery, in his book Foreign Vocabulary of the [Koran], has gathered some 300 pages, documenting over one-hundred (non-Arabic) words, many of which must have been used in pre-Qur'anic Arabic, but quite a number also which must have been used little or not at all before they were included in the Qur'an (Jeffery 1938:79). One must wonder why these words were borrowed, as it puts doubt on whether "Allah's language" is sufficient enough to explain and reveal all that Allah had intended. Some of the foreign words include:

1) **Egyptian words:** *Pharaoh*, a word which means king or potentate, is repeated in the Qur'an 84 times.

2) **Accadian (No.Iraq) words:** *Adam* and *Eden* which are repeated 24 times. A more correct term for "Adam" in Arabic would be *basharan* or *insan*, meaning "mankind." "Eden" would be the word *janna* in Arabic, which means "garden."

3) **Assyrian words:** *Abraham* (sometimes recorded as *Ibrahim*). The correct Arabic equivalent would be *Abu Raheem*.

4) **Persian words:**

*Haroot* and *Maroot* are Persian names for angels.

*Sirat* meaning "the path" has the Arabic equivalent, *Altareeq*.

*Hoor* meaning "disciple" has the Arabic equivalent, *Tilmeeth*.

*Jinn* meaning "good or evil demons" has the Arabic equivalent, *Ruh*.

*Firdaus* meaning "the highest or seventh heaven" has the Arabic equivalent, *Jannah*.

5) **Syriac words:** *Taboot*, *Taghouth*, *Zakat*, *Malakout* are all Syriac words which have been borrowed and included in the "Arabic" Qur'an.

6) **Hebrew words:** *Heber*, *Sakinah*, *Maoon*, *Taurat*, *Jehannim*, *Tufan* (deluge) are all Hebrew words which have been borrowed and included in the "Arabic" Qur'an.

7) **Greek words:** *Injil*, which means "gospel" was borrowed, yet it has the Arabic equivalent, *Bisharah*. *Iblis* is not Arabic, but a corruption of the Greek word *Diabolos*.

8) **Christian Aramaic:** *Qiyama* is the Aramaic word for resurrection.

9) **Christian Ethiopic:** *Malak* (2:33) is the Ethiopic word for angel.

### **IDI THE QUR'AN'S SUPPOSED UNIVERSAL QUALITIES:**

Another claim by Muslims for the authority of the Qur'an is its universal application for all people and for all time. Yet is this the case?

There are many who believe that the Qur'an follows so closely the life and thought of the Arab world during the 7th-9th centuries, that indeed it was written for that specific environment, and not as a universal document for all peoples. Suras 16:103; 26:195; and 42:7 point to its uniquely Arabic character.

In fact, the Qur'an, rather than being a universal document served to provide personal advantages for Muhammad. Examples of this can be found in suras: 33:36-38 (*Zayd* and *Zaynab*), 33:50-52 (rotation of wives and special privilege of Muhammad), 33:53-54 (privacy of Muhammad, and non marriage to his widows) and

66:1 (abstaining from wives or honey?-see Yusuf Ali's note no.5529). Why would a document written for the benefit of all of humanity refer to personal incidents of one man? Do we find similar examples with the prophets in the previous scriptures?

Indeed, it seems that Muhammad was the right prophet for the Arabs. He took their culture and universalized it. Take for instance these three examples:

1) The Arabs gloried in their **language**; Muhammad declared it the divine language, maintaining that the everlasting tablets in heaven recorded the original revelations in the Arabic script (Sura 85:22-23). Yet, he seemed to forget the fact that all the previous scriptures were written in Hebrew and Greek and not Arabic.

2) The Arabs gloried in their **traditional practices and customs** of the desert; practices such as predatory war, slavery, polygamy, and concubinage. Muhammad impressed upon all these usages the seal of a divine sanction. Yet it is these very areas which have proved such a stumbling-block to the Judeo-Christian world ever since, as they reflect little of the ethos of the preceding scriptures; an ethos which guides the laws and practices of much of the modern western world today.

3) The Arabs gloried in the holiness of **Mecca**. Muhammad made it the only portal whereby men could enter paradise. Yet there is no extra-Qur'anic documentation that Mecca was much more than a small nondescript hamlet until well into the 7th century (Crone-Cook 1977:171). It was not situated on the coast, nor did it have an adequate water supply, like its neighbour Ta'if, which, unlike Mecca, was well known as a rest-stop on the local caravan routes (Crone 1987:6-7).

Therefore, one can say that Muhammad took the Arab people just as he found them, and while he applied some new direction, he declared much that they did to be very good and sacred from change (Shorrosh 1988:180).

There are other examples of a specific Arabic influence on the Qur'an; two of which are the status of women, and the use of the sword.

## **[1] The Inferiority of Women in the Qur'an**

It has been noted that Islam improved upon the conditions for Arab women of that time. For instance, it outlawed the practice of burying infant girls alive. While this is commendable, one must remember that in comparison to the surrounding cultures of the 7th-9th centuries (particularly the Christian cultures) the position allocated to women in the Qur'an was certainly a step backwards.

In the Qur'an women have a distinct inferior status to that of men. While the Qur'an permits women to participate in battle, it also allows a Muslim husband to cast his wife adrift without giving a single reason or notice, while the same right is not reserved for the woman. The husband possesses absolute, immediate, and unquestioned power of divorce (suras 2:224-230 and 33:49).

Complete obedience is required of the wife, while rebellion can be punished by beating (or scourging) for her rebellion in sura 4:34 (Yusuf Ali adds "lightly," yet the Arabic does not allow for this translation). No privilege of a corresponding nature is reserved for the wife. Men have double the inheritance of women (sura 4:11,176). In addition to the four wives allowed by law, a Muslim man can have an unlimited number of slave girls as concubines (or sexual partners) according to sura al-Nisa 4:24-25.

Even paradise creates inequalities for women. Suras 55:56; 56:36 and 78:33 state that paradise is a place where there are beautiful young virgins waiting to serve the "righteous" (according to sura 78:31). These virgins, we are told, will have beautiful, big, lustrous eyes (according to sura 56:22). They will be Maidens who are chaste, who avert their eyes out of purity (according to sura 55:56. See Yusuf Ali's note pertaining to this verse, number 5210). These maidens will also have a delicate pink complexion (according to sura 55:58. See Yusuf Ali's rather odd note, number 5211). Nowhere are we told what awaits the Muslim women of this world in paradise: the Muslim mothers and sisters. In fact we are left wondering exactly who these virgin maidens are, and where they come from?

With Qur'anic pronouncements such as we have read in the preceding chapters it is not surprising that much of the Muslim world today reflects in its laws and societal makeup such a total bias against women?

Though statistics are hard to find, we do know that, currently, of the twenty-three countries with the worst records of jobs for women (women making up only ten to twenty percent of all workers), seventeen are Muslim countries (Kidron & Segal 1991:96-97). Similarly, of the eleven countries with the worst record for disparagement of opportunity between men and women, ten are Muslim states. The widest gaps were found in three Muslim countries: Bangla Desh, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt (Kidron & Segal 1991:57).

Another revealing statistic shows that of the twelve states with the worst records for unequal treatment of girls, seven are Muslim states. The bottom three listed are UAE, Bahrain, and Brunei (Kidron & Segal 1991:56).

With this kind of data before us we need to ask whether the Qur'an is God's absolute word for all people for all time, and if so, then why only half of the world's population (its males) receive full benefit from its laws, while the other half (its women) continue in an unequal relationship?

While one may justifiably argue that this is not representative of true Islamic teaching, it does show us how those in Muslim countries, using the Qur'an as their foundation treat their women, and what we might expect if we were living in that type of environment. Considering the inferior status reserved for women in the Qur'an, however, it does not surprise us when we read the statistics above.

Does not the previous revelation, the Bible, have a more universalistic and wholesome concern for women? Take for instance Ephesians 5:22-25 where we find the true ideal for a relationship, where it says: "husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." This scripture demands a sacrificial love by the husband, one which puts the interests of the loved one before that of his own. This sacrificial love is best explained in 1 Corinthians 13:1,4-8.

One might suggest that strict Christian communities would likewise "force" their women to remain housebound and uneducated. The case can be shown that many modern Christian women do **choose** to put off their careers until their children are grown and on their own. The operative word here, however, is "choice." It is normally not something which is forced on the mother, nor has it proved to denigrate the woman or the child once they have made that choice.

It is understandable, then, why so many people in the west consider Islam, based on the Qur'an, an archaic and barbaric religion, which forces women to regress back to a forgotten era, an era when women had few rights or freedoms to create their own destiny.

## **[2] The "Sword" found in the Qur'an**

Concerning the sword in the Qur'an, the testimony of Islam today is that of a religion which condones violence for the sake of Allah.

Though many Muslims try to deny this, they have to agree that there are ample examples of violence found not only within the Qur'an, but also exemplified within the life of the prophet Muhammad.

While in Mecca Muhammad was surrounded by enemies, and while there he taught his followers toleration, according to sura 2:256, which says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error..." As a minor player, surrounded by enemies he did well to receive this *convenient* revelation. But the call for toleration changed when his power was established in Medina, once the charter had been written which regulated life between the various groups.

Muhammad needed a livelihood for himself and those who had come with him from Mecca. Thus he undertook a number of "expeditions," sending groups of his soldiers out to raid Meccan caravans in order to find booty.

Though there was a rule in the *Hijaz* at that time not to fight during the "holy month," Muhammad, nonetheless sent a number of his troops to raid an unsuspecting trading caravan. This caused havoc in his own camp because a Meccan had been killed in the month in which bloodshed was forbidden. Promptly another convenient revelation came which authorized the attack (read sura 2:217).

Later on, in 624 A.D., after having been in Medina for two years, a Meccan caravan of 1,000 men was passing close to the south-west of Medina. Muhammad, with only 300 men went out to attack it at the battle of *Badr*. He defeated the Meccans, and consequently received tremendous status, which helped his army grow.

The Medinans participated in further battles, some of which they won (i.e. the battle of the **Trenches**) and others which they lost (the battle of *Uhud*). In fact, Muhammad himself is known to have conducted 29 battles and planned 39 others (Sira Halabiyya, Ibn Kathir's Bidaya Wa Nihaya, and Ibn Hisham's Sira).

Muslims, however, continue to downplay any emphasis on violence within the Qur'an, and they emphatically insist that the *Jihad*, or Holy War was only a means of defence, and was never used as an offensive act. Sahih Muslim III makes this point, saying, "the sword has not been used recklessly by the Muslims; it has been wielded purely with humane feelings in the wider interest of humanity" (Sahih Muslim III, pg.938).

In the Mishkat II we find an explanation for *Jihad*:

*[Jihad] is the best method of earning both spiritual and temporal. If victory is won, there is enormous booty and conquest of a country which cannot be equalled to any other source of earnings. If there is defeat or death, there is ever-lasting Paradise and a great spiritual benefit. This sort of Jihad is conditional upon pure motive, i.e. for establishing the kingdom of Allah on earth* (Mishkat II, pg.253)

Also in Mishkat II we learn with regard to *Jihad*, that:

*Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: To whichever village you go and settle therein, there is your share therein, and whichever village disobeys Allah and His Messenger, its one-fifth is for Allah and His Messenger, and the remainder is for you* (Muslim, Mishkat II, pg.412).

The claim that Muslims acted only in self-defense is simply untrue. What were Muslims defending in North Africa, or Spain, France, India, Persia, Syria, Anatolia or the Balkans? These countries all had previous civilizations, many of which were more sophisticated than that of the Arabs, yet they all (outside of France) fell during the conquests of the Arabs in the first hundred years, and their cultures were soon eradicated by that of Islam. Does that not evidence a rather offensive interpretation for *Jihad*?

We can understand the authority for this history when we read certain passages from the Qur'an, which, itself stipulates a particularly strong use of violence. The full impact of the invective against the unbeliever can be found in sura 9:5 which says, "*But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay those who join other gods with Allah wherever you find them; besiege them, seize them, lay in wait for them with every kind of ambush...*" Of like nature is sura 47:4 which says, "*When you encounter the unbelievers, strike off their heads, until ye have made a great slaughter among them...*"

Similarly sura 9:29 states: "...*Make war upon such of those to whom the scriptures have been given as believe not in Allah, or in the last day, and who forbid not what Allah and his apostle have forbidden...until they pay tribute...*" And in sura 8:39 we find, "*And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression. And there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do.*"

The murder of between 600-700 Banu Kuraiza Medinan Jewish males by the sword, and the slavery of their women give testimony to this sura (Nehls 1987:117)

According to the Dictionary of Islam we read:

*When an infidel's country is conquered by a Muslim ruler, its inhabitants are offered three alternatives: 1) the reception of Islam, in which case the conquered became enfranchised citizens of the Muslim state, 2) the payment of **Jizya** tax, by which unbelievers obtained "protection" and became **Dhimmis**, provided they were not idolaters, and 3) death by the sword to those who would not pay the **Jizya** tax* (Hughes 1885:243).

War is sanctioned in Islam, with enormous rewards promised to those who fight for Allah, according to sura 4:74. Later in verse 84, Muhammad gives himself the divine order to fight. This is the verse which is the basis for calling Islam “the religion of the sword” (Shorosh 1988:174).

In sura 5:33 the Qur'an orders those who fight Allah and his messenger to be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off; or they can be expelled out of the land. In sura 48:16-17, we read that all who die “fighting in the ways of the Lord” (*Jihad*) are richly rewarded, but those who retreat are sorely punished.

The first blood shed under Muhammad was carried out by a blind disciple named *Umair*, who stabbed and killed a woman named *Asma* while she slept suckling her baby because she had criticized Muhammad with poetic verses. Upon hearing of this Muhammad said, “Behold a man that hath assisted the Lord and His prophet. Call him not blind, call him rather *Umair*, the seeing.” (Nehls 1987:122).

Therefore, when those of us who are Christians read these suras, and see the example of the prophet himself, we find a total rejection of the previous teachings of Jesus who calls us to live in peace and put away the sword (Matthew 26:52). We then are incredulous when we hear Muslims claim that Islam is the religion of peace. The record speaks for itself.

For those countries who aspire to use Islamic law, statistics prove revealing. According to the 1991 *State of the World Atlas*, while only five northern countries (i.e. western) are categorized as “Terror States” (those involved in using assassination, disappearances and torture), twenty-eight of the thirty-two Muslim states fall into this category (except UAE, Qatar and Mali) (Kidron & Segal 1991:62-63).

Furthermore, it seems that most Muslim countries today are following the example of their prophet and are involved in some sort of armed conflict. Muslims correctly maintain that western countries are also involved in violence (such as the bombing by the U.S. of Libya in 1986, or the British miscarriages of justice against IRA suspects). Yet the fact that these examples are all well known and well-publicized by the western press highlights the openness by western governments to divulge what they are doing, and even correct past mistakes (such as the freeing of “The Birmingham Six”).

It is difficult to know exactly where the truth lies. While the West documents and publishes its criminal activities openly, the Muslim countries say very little. Lists which delineate where each country stands in relation to murders, sex offenses and criminality include most of the western countries, yet only four Muslim countries out of the thirty-two have offered statistics for the number of internal murders, while only six out of the thirty-two have offered a list of sex offenses, and only four of the thirty-two have divulged their level of criminality. Therefore, until more Muslim countries are willing to come forward with statistics, it is impossible to evaluate the claim which they make: that western states have a higher degree of degradation and criminality than that of Muslim states.

We do know, however, that in the 1980's, of the fourteen countries who were involved in ongoing “general wars,” nine of them were Muslim countries, while only one was a non-western Christian country (Kidron & Segal 1991:102-103). Why, we wonder, are so many Muslim countries embroiled in so many wars, many of which are against other Muslims? Muslims answer that these are not good examples because they are not authentic Muslim states. Yet, can we not say that to the contrary, these countries do indeed follow the examples which we find so readily not only within the text of the Qur'an, but within the life of the prophet, and in the history of the first few centuries of Islam. Muhammad's life, and the Qur'an which he “gave” to the world, both give sufficient authority for the sword in Islam. While this may cause the 20th century western Muslim to squirm uncomfortably, it cannot be denied that there is ample precedent for violence within their scriptures and within their own history (past and present). What concerns us here, however, is whether the witness of violence within Islam exemplifies the heart of a loving and compassionate God, one who calls Himself merciful; or whether it rather exemplifies the character of 7th-9th century Arabia, with all its brutal desert tribal disputes and warfare?

Compare the contrasting concept that Jesus offers, which we can find in the gospel, in Matthew 5:38-44:

*You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take*



*your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one kilometre, go with him two kilometres. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:38-44).*

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So what can we say about the authority of the Qur'an? Can we say it is a divinely inspired book sent by Allah for all of humanity, for all time? Can it claim supernatural as well as literary qualities, which not only places it above other revelations, but points to its divine origins? Much of what I have offered you here points to the fact that the Qur'an lacks in all three qualities, and seems to reflect more the life and times of its supposed mediator than that of the heart of a universal God. The idolatrous tendency of Muslims towards the Qur'an, as well as the confusion of its literary makeup, and the special conditions given to Muhammad, point to a book put together by one man, or as we now know, a group of much later men, than an inspired piece of God's revealed word.

If one were to contrast the 66 books of the Bible written over hundreds of years by at least 40 different authors, with the Qur'an which came through one man, Muhammad, during his lifetime, there would be no contest as to which was the superior literature. In the final analysis, the Qur'an simply does not fit the breadth of vision, nor the literary style or structure of that found in the Old and New Testament. To go from the Bible to the Qur'an is to go from the superior to the inferior, from the authentic to the counterfeit, from God's perspective to that of an individual, caught up and controlled by his own world and times.

I end this section with a quote from an expert on the Qur'an, Dr. Tisdall, who says:

*The Qur'an breathes the air of the desert, it enables us to hear the battle-cries of the Prophet's followers as they rushed to the onset, it reveals the working of Muhammad's own mind, and shows the gradual declension of his character as he passed from the earnest and sincere though visionary enthusiast into the conscious imposter and open sensualist. (Tisdall 1904:27).*

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## [E] THE COLLATION, OR COLLECTION OF THE QUR'ANIC TEXT:

We now take the discussion concerning the authority for the Qur'an away from its makeup and ask the question of how it came to us? In order to do this, we will give special emphasis on the problems which we find with its collation. We will also ask why, if it is the Word of God, so much of its content is not only self-contradictory, but not consistent with the claims of Muslim Traditions? From there we will then consider where the Qur'an received much of its material, or rather, from where many of its stories were derived. Let us then begin with the alleged collection of the Qur'anic text.

Muslims claim that the Qur'an is perfect in its textual history, that there are no textual defects (as they say we have in our Bible). They maintain that it is perfect not only in its content and style, but the order and script as we have it today is an exact parallel of the preserved tablets in heaven. This, they contend, is so because Allah has preserved it. Therefore, the Qur'an, they feel, must be the Word of God. While we have already looked at the content and style of the Qur'an and found it wanting, the claim to its textual purity is an assertion which we need to examine in greater detail.

### [1] The Periods of Revelation:

According to Muslim Tradition the "revelations" of the suras (or books) were received by the prophet Muhammad, via the angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) within three periods. The first is referred to as the **1st Meccan period**, and lasted between 611-615 A.D. During this time the suras contain many of the warnings, and much of the leading ideas concerning who Allah is, and what He expected of His creation (i.e. suras 1, 51-53, 55-56, 68-70, 73-75, 77-97, 99-104, 111-114).

The 2nd period, referred to as the **2nd Meccan period** (between 616-622 A.D.) had longer suras, dealing with doctrines, many of which echoed Biblical material. It was during this time that Islam makes the claim of being the one true religion (i.e. suras 6-7, 10-21, 23, 25-32, 34-46, 50, 54, 67, 71-72, 76).

The third period, referred to as the **Medinan period** (between 623-632 A.D.) centered in Medina and lasted roughly ten years, until Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. There is a distinct shift in content during this period. Divine approval is given for Muhammad's leadership, and much of the material deals with local historical events. There is a change from the preaching of divine matters, to that of governing. Consequently, the suras are much more political and social in their makeup (suras 2-5, 8-9, 22-24, 33, 37, 47-49, 57-59, 60-66, 98, 110).

### [2] The method of collection:

While there is ongoing discussion concerning whether Muhammad ever received any revelations, there is considerably more skepticism concerning whether or not the Qur'an which we have today is indeed made up entirely of those revelations which he did supposedly receive.

Many Muslims ardently contend that the Qur'an which is in our hands today was in its completed form even before the death of Muhammad, and that the collation of the texts after his death was simply an exercise in amassing that which had already existed. There are even those who believe that many of the companions of the prophet had memorized the text, and it is they who could have been used to corroborate the final collation by Muhammad's secretary, Zaid ibn Thabit. If these assertions are true, then indeed we do have a revelation which is well worth studying. History, however, points to quite a different scenario, one which most Muslims find difficulty in maintaining.

Muslim Tradition tells us that Muhammad had not foreseen his death, and so had made no preparations for the gathering of his revelations, in order to place them into one document. Thus, according to tradition, it was left up to Muhammad's followers to write down what had been said.

**Al Bukhari**, a Muslim scholar of the 9th-10th century, and the most authoritative of the Muslim tradition compilers, writes that whenever Muhammad fell into one of his unpredictable trances his revelations

were written on whatever was handy at the time. The leg or thigh bones of dead animals were used, as well as palm leaves, parchments, papers, skins, mats, stones, and bark. And when there was nothing at hand the attempt was made by his disciples to memorize it as closely as possible.

The principle disciples at that time were: **Abdullah ibn Mas'ud**, **Abu Musa**, and **Ubayy ibn Ka'b**, all of whom were close companions of Muhammad.

According to Sahih Bukhari, during the years following Muhammad's death, passages of the Qur'an were lost irretrievably when a number of reciters died at the **Battle of Yamama**. This incident together with the Qur'an's automatic completion as a revelation, now that its mediator had passed away, compelled a companion of the prophet named **Hazrat Umar** to suggest to the current caliph, **Abu Bakr**, that the existing revelations be collected.

Initially the aging caliph demurred, as he was not willing to do what the prophet had not done. However, he later changed his mind, due to the crisis caused by the death of the reciters at Yamama. The secretary of Muhammad, **Zaid ibn Thabit** was commissioned by Abu Bakr to collect the sayings of the prophet and put them into a document.

#### **a) Zaid's Collection:**

Zaid's reply, according to Bukhari, is interesting. He is purported to have said that it would have been easier if they had demanded that he shift a mountain then collect the suras of the Qur'an. The reason for this rather odd statement becomes obvious when we find that, in his search for the passages of the Qur'an he was forced to use as his sources the leg or thigh bones of dead animals, as well as palm leaves, parchments, papers, skins, mats, stones, bark, and the memories of the prophet's companions (Bukhari, vol.6, pg.477).

This shows that there were no Muslims at that time who had memorized the entire Qur'an by heart, otherwise the collection would have been a simple task. Had there been individuals who knew the Qur'an by heart, Zaid would only have had to go to any one of the companions and write down what they dictated. Instead, Zaid was overwhelmed by the assignment, and was forced to "search" for the passages from these men who had memorized certain segments. He also had to refer to rather strange objects to find the ayas he needed. These are hardly reliable sources for a supposed "perfect" copy of the eternal tablets which exist in heaven.

What evidence, we ask, is there that his final copy was complete?

It is immediately apparent that the official copy of the Qur'an rested on very fragile sources. There is no way that anyone can maintain with certainty that Zaid collected all the sayings of the prophet. Had some of the objects been lost, or thrown away? Did some of the ayas die with the companions who were killed at the battle of Yamama? We are left with more questions than answers.

In Sahih Bukhari (volume 6, page 478) Zaid is quoted as saying that he found the last verses of sura 9 (verses 128 and 129) from a certain individual. Then he continues by saying that he found this verse from no-one else. In other words there was no-one else who knew this verse. Thus had he not traced it from this one man, he would not have traced it at all!

This leads us to only one possible conclusion: that we can never be sure that the Qur'an which was finally compiled was, in fact, complete! Zaid concedes that he had to find this one verse from this one man. This underlines the fact that there was no-one who knew the Qur'an by heart (except possibly this man), and thus could corroborate that Zaid's copy was complete. Consequently the final composition of the Qur'an depended on the discretion of one man; not on the revelation of God, but on an ordinary fallible man, who put together, with the resources which he had available, what he believed to be a complete Qur'an. This flies in the face of the bold claim by Muslims that the book is now, and was then, complete.

Zaid's text was given to **Hafsah**, one of the wives of Muhammad, and the daughter of **Umar**, the 2nd Caliph. We then pick up the story with the reign of Uthman, the 3rd Caliph.

#### **b) Competing Collections:**

In Sahih Bukhari, (vol. 6, pg.479) we read that there were at this time different readings of the Qur'an in the different provinces of the Muslim world. A number of the companions of Muhammad had compiled their own codices of the text. In other words, though Zaid had collated the official text under Abu Bakr, there were other texts which were circulating which were considered authoritative as well.

The two most popular codices were those of **Abdullah ibn Mas'ud**, whose manuscript became the standard for the area of Iraq, and **Ubayy ibn Ka'b**, whose manuscript became standard in Syria.

These and other extant codices were basically consistent with each other in their general content, but a large number of variant readings, many seriously affecting the text, existed in all the manuscripts such that no two codices were entirely the same (which we'll talk about later in the paper).

In addition, the texts were being recited in varying dialects in the different provinces of the Muslim world. During the seventh century, Arabic was composed in a so-called *scriptio defectiva* in which only the consonants were written, much like ancient Hebrew. Since there were no vowels, the vocalization was left to the reader. Some verbs could be read as active or passive, while some nouns could be read with different case endings, and some forms could be read as either nouns or verbs.

### **[3] The Standardization of one Text:**

Consequently, during the reign of **Uthman**, the third Caliph, a deliberate attempt was made to standardize the Qur'an and impose a single text upon the whole Muslim community.

The codex of **Zaid ibn Thabit**, taken from the manuscript of **Hafsah**, was chosen by Uthman for this purpose, to the consternation of both Mas'ud and Ibn Ka'b. Zaid ibn Thabit was a much younger man, who had not yet been born at the time Mas'ud had recited 70 suras by heart before Muhammad.

According to Muslim tradition Zaid's codex was chosen by Uthman because the language used, the '*Quraishi* dialect,' was local to Mecca, and so had become the standard Arabic. Tradition maintains that Zaid, along with three scholars of the *Quraishi* tribe of Mecca, had written the codex in this *Quraishi* dialect, as it had been revealed to Muhammad in this dialect. Linguists today, however, are still at a quandary to know what exactly this *Quraishi* dialect was, as it doesn't exist today and therefore cannot be identified. Furthermore, the dialect which we find in the present Qur'an does not differ from the language which was current in other parts of the *Hijaz* at that time. While it makes for a good theory, it has little historical evidence with which to back it up.

A further reason for the choice of Zaid's codex, according to tradition, was that it had been kept in virtual seclusion for many years, and so had not attracted the publicity as one of the varying texts, as had the codices of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Ironically, by virtue of their popularity, Mas'ud's and Ka'b's codices were rejected as sources for the final Qur'an and supplanted by the codex of an individual who neither had the notoriety, nor the experience, and whose text (as we shall soon discover) had never been selected as authoritative by the prophet, as had the other two.

Consequently, copies of Zaid's codex were then sent out and dispersed throughout every Muslim province, while all the other manuscripts were summarily destroyed.

It is evident from this discussion that the final choice for an authoritative text had little to do with its authenticity, but had more to do with the fact that it was not a controversial manuscript. It is also evident that there were no two Qur'ans which existed at that time which were exactly alike. This tradition tells us that other whole copies did exist, yet not one of the other texts were spared the order for their destruction. We must conclude that the destruction of the other manuscripts was a drastic effort to standardize the Qur'anic text. While we may have one standard text today, there is no proof that it corresponds with the original. We can only say that it may possibly be similar to the Uthmanic recension, a recension which was one of many. Yet, what evidence is there that in all instances it was the correct one? We don't know as we have no others with which to compare.

### **[4] The Missing Verses:**

This then brings up another difficult problem: how can we be sure that what Zaid ibn Thabit included in his codex (or manuscript) contained the full content of Muhammad's revelation? The fact is we simply cannot. We are forced to rely on Muslim tradition to tell us. Yet, interestingly, it is Muslim tradition which informs us that Zaid himself initially cast doubt on his own codex.

### **a) sura 33:23**

According to Sahih Bukhari (volume 6, pg.79), despite the fact that Zaid's text had been copied out and sent to the seven different cities, Zaid suddenly remembered that a verse which the prophet had quoted earlier was missing from his text. Zaid is quoted as saying that this missing verse was verse 23 of sura 33, which says, "Among the believers are men who have been true in their covenant with Allah." So he searched for the verse until he found it with Hussaima ibn al Ansari.

Thus, we find that after the copies had been sent out claiming to be the only authentic and complete copies of the Qur'an available, Zaid, and he alone, recorded a verse which was missing; a verse which, once again, was only found with one man. This resembles the previous occasion where a verse was only found with one man.

The conclusion is obvious: initially all of those seven copies which were sent out to the provinces were imperfect. But even more concerning is the fact that it was due to the recollection of one man, and the memory of another that the Qur'an was finally completed. Once again it is obvious that there simply could not have been any man at that time who knew the whole Qur'an by heart. This is yet another instance which contradicts the argument posed by Muslims that the Qur'an had been memorized by certain men during the early days of Islam.

But of more importance is the troubling question of whether there were perhaps other verses which were overlooked or were left out? The answer to this question can be found in another of the authoritative traditions, that of Sahih Muslim.

### **b) The Verse on Stoning**

Muslim maintains that key passages were missing from Zaid's text. The most famous is the verse of stoning. All the major traditions speak of this missing verse. According to Ibn Ishaq's version (pg. 684) we read,

*God sent Muhammad, and sent down the scripture to him. Part of what he sent down was the passage on stoning. Umar says, 'We read it, we were taught it, and we heeded it. The apostle [Muhammad] stoned, and we stoned after him. I fear that in the time to come men will say that they find no mention of stoning in God's book, and thereby go astray in neglecting an ordinance which God has sent down. Verily, stoning in the book of God is a penalty laid on married men and women who commit adultery.'*

Therefore, according to Umar, the stoning verse was part of the original Qur'an, the revelation which Allah sent down. But now it is missing. In many of the traditions we find numerous reports of adulterous men and women who were stoned by the prophet and his companions. Yet today we read in the Qur'an, sura 24:32 that the penalty for adultery is 100 lashes. Umar said adultery was not only a capital offence, but one which demanded stoning. That verse is now missing from the Qur'an, and that is why Umar raised this issue.

Muslims contend that Christians have the same problem with certain passages in the Bible which are not considered to be authoritative, such as Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. This, however, is not at all the same problem. We know that these passages were included in the earliest translations of the Bible, as the translators then did not have at their disposal the oldest and thus most authoritative manuscripts from which to translate. Since then older manuscripts have been discovered which do not include these passages. Thus, in order to make sure that our current translations reflect the most authoritative manuscripts, present-day Christian translators no longer include these erroneous passages in the newer translations. And if they do, they state in the margins that they are not considered authoritative. The problem thus is not one of error in the original text, but the practice of simply bringing the text of the scriptures up-to-date as older and thus more authoritative manuscripts are found. At no time have any of the translators added or subtracted any material from the manuscripts in their possession. Their intent has always been to produce a translation of the scriptures which is as close to the original text as is possible. The collators of the Qur'an, on the other hand, have purposely removed the verse on stoning, which we now know to have been included in the original text. This is a serious problem.

Therefore, Muslims will need to ask themselves whether indeed their Qur'an can claim to be the same as that passed down by Muhammad to his companions? With evidence such as that presented above, the Qur'an in our possession today becomes all the more suspect.

## **[5] The Variations between the Codices:**

Yet that is not all. Another glaring problem with Zaid's text is that it differed from the other codices which coexisted with his.

Arthur Jeffery has done the classic work on the variants of the early codices in his book Materials for the history of the Text of the Qur'an, printed in 1937. The three main codices which he lists are those which we have referred to earlier, and include:

1) **Ibn Mas'ud** (Abd Allah b. Mas'ud) (died 653), from **Kufa**, in Iraq. It is he who is reported to have learned 70 suras directly from Muhammad, and was appointed by Muhammad as one of the first teachers of Qur'anic recitation (according to Ibn Sa'd). Mas'ud became a leading authority on the Qur'an and hadith in Kufa, Iraq. He refused to destroy his copy of the Qur'an or stop teaching it when the Uthmanic recension was made official.

2) **Ubayy b. Ka'b** (died 649) a Medinan Muslim who was associated with **Damascus**, Syria. Prior to that he was a secretary for the prophet, and was considered by some to be more prominent than Mas'ud in Qur'anic understanding, during the prophet's lifetime. Ubayy's codex had two extra suras. He destroyed his codex after the Uthmanic recension.

3) **Abu Musa** (died 662), a Yemenite, though his codex was accepted in **Basra**, where he served as governor under Umar. His codex was large and it contained the two extra suras of Ubayy's codex, and other verses not found in other codices (Jeffery, pp.209-211).

In addition to these three Jeffery classifies 12 other codices belonging to the companions of the prophet, which were considered as primary.

One of these **Ali b. Abi Talib** (d.661) a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, is said to have been the first to collect the Qur'an after the prophet's death, and to have arranged the suras in some sort of chronological order.

According to Jeffery, there were thousands of variations between the different codices.

### **a) Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's Codex**

Take for instance the codex of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, a very close companion of the prophet, according to the traditions. As we know it was he who refused to hand over his manuscript after the order went out from Uthman for all existing copies to be burned.

There is much evidence today to show that, in fact, his text is far more reliable than Hafsah's manuscript, which we know to be the one collated by Zaid ibn Thabit. Ibn Mas'ud alone was present with Muhammad when he reviewed the content of the Qur'an every year during the month of Ramadan.

In the well-known collection of traditions by Ibn Sa'd (vol. 2, pg.441), we read these words:

*Ibn Abbas asked, 'Which of the two readings of the Qur'an do you prefer?' [The prophet] answered, 'The reading of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.' Verily the Qur'an was recited before the apostle of Allah, once in every Ramadan, except the last year when it was recited twice. Then Abdullah ibn Mas'ud came to him, and he learned what was altered and abrogated.*

Thus no-one knew the Qur'an better than he did. In the same tradition by Ibn Sa'd (vol. 2, pg.442) it says,

*No sura was revealed but I [Mas'ud] knew about it and what was revealed. If I had known anyone knowing more of the book of Allah than me, I would have gone to him.*

Ibn Mas'ud lays claim here to be the foremost authority of the text of the Qur'an. In fact, it is Sahih Muslim (vol. 4, pg.1312) who informs us that Mas'ud knew seventy suras by heart, and was considered to have

a better understanding of the Qur'an than the other companions of the prophet. He recited these seventy passages before the prophet and the companions, and no-one disputed with him.

In Sahih Bukhari (vol. 5, pgs.96-97) we read that Muhammad himself singled out Abdullah ibn Mas'ud as the first and foremost authority on the Qur'an.

According to Ibn Sa'd (vol. 2, pg.444) Mas'ud learned his seventy suras while Zaid was still a youth. Thus his authority should have been greater as he knew so much of the Qur'an long before Zaid became a man.

Arthur Jeffery in his book points out several thousand variants taken from over thirty "main sources." Of special note are those which he found between the codex of Ibn Mas'ud and that of Zaid ibn Thabit. He also found that Mas'ud's codex agreed with the other codices which existed at the expense of Zaid's text (while we don't have the time to go into all the variations, it might be helpful if you could obtain a copy of Arthur Jeffrey's book: Materials for the history of the Text of the Qur'an).

According to Jeffery, Abu Mas'ud's Codex was different from the Uthmanic text in several different ways:

- 1) It did not contain the *Fatiha* (the opening sura, sura 1), nor the two charm suras (suras 113 and 114).
- 2) It contained different vowels within the same consonantal text (Jeffery 25-113).
- 3) It contained Shi'ite readings (i.e. suras 5:67; 24:35; 26:215; 33:25,33,56; 42:23; 47:29; 56:10; 59:7; 60:3; 75:17-19) (Jeffery 1937:40,65,68).
- 4) Entire phrases were different, such as:
  - a) sura 3:19= Mas'ud has "*The way of the Hanifs*" instead of "*Behold, the [true] religion (din) of God is Islam.*"
  - b) sura 3:39= Mas'ud has "*Then Gabriel called to him, 'O Zachariah'*", instead of the Uthmanic reading: "*Then the angels called to him as he stood praying in the sanctuary.*"
  - c) Only his codex begins sura 9 with the Bismillah, while the Uthmanic text does not ("*bismi 'llahi 'l-rahmani 'l-rahim*" meaning, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate").
- 5) Finally, the order of the suras in Ibn Mas'ud's codex is different from the Uthmanic text in that Mas'ud's list arranges the suras more closely in order of descending length.

#### **b) Ubayy Ka'b's Codex**

Ubayy Ka'b's codex also had variations. Though there are those who disagree, it seems to have been less important than Ibn Mas'ud's, as it was not the source of any secondary codices.

It included two suras not found in the Uthmanic or Ibn Mas'ud's texts: the **surat al-Khal'**, with three verses, and **surat al-Hafd**, with six verses (Jeffery 1937:180ff). Al-Fadl b. Shadhan is said to have seen a copy of Ubayy's 116 suras (rather than the 114 of Uthman's) in a village near Basra in the middle of the 3rd century A.H. (10th century A.D.). The order of suras in Ubayy's codex is said to have differed from that of Uthman's.

### **[6] Conclusions on the Collation of the Qur'anic Text:**

These variations in the codices show that the original text of the Qur'an cannot have been perfect. The fact that a little known secretary (Zaid ibn Thabit) was chosen as the final arbiter of the Qur'anic text points to possible political interference. The admission by this secretary that the task of collating the verses was unduly daunting and his consequent pronouncement that one verse was initially missing from his finished text (sura 33:23) while another verse, according to authoritative sources, is still missing (the stoning verse) puts even more suspicion on its authenticity.

On top of that, the many variations which exist between Zaid's text and those of supposedly more authoritative collators (Mas'ud and Ka'b) can only add to the perception of many today that the Uthmanic Qur'an which we supposedly have today leaves us with more doubt than assurance for its authority as the perfect word of God.

Yet that is not all. We also know from Muslim tradition that the Uthmanic Qur'an had to be reviewed and amended to meet the Caliph's standard for a single approved text even after Uthman's death. This was carried out by **al-Hajjaj**, the governor of Kufa, who made eleven distinct amendments and corrections to the text, which were later reduced to seven readings. If the other codices were in existence today, one could compare the one with the other to ascertain which could claim to be closest to the original. Even Hafsa's copy, the original from which the final text was taken, was later destroyed by **Mirwan**, the governor of Medina. **But for what reason???**

Does this act not intimate that there were problems between the other copies, possibly glaring contradictions, which needed to be thrown out? Can we really believe that the rest were destroyed simply because Uthman wished to have only one manuscript which conformed to the Quraishi dialect (if indeed such a dialect existed)? Why then burn the other codices? If, as some contend today, the other codices were only personal reminiscences of the writers, then why did the prophet give those codices so much authority during his life-time? Furthermore, how could Uthman claim to judge one from the other now that Muhammad was no longer around?

There are certain scholars today who believe that Zaid ibn Thabit and his co-workers could have reworked the Arabic, so as to make the text literately sophisticated and thus seemingly superior to other Arabic works of its time; and thus create the claim that this was indeed the illiterate Muhammad's one miracle.

There are others, such as John Wansbrough from SOAS, who go even further, contending that all of the accounts about companion codices and individual variants were fabricated by later Muslim jurists and philologists. He asserts that the collection stories and the accounts of the companion codices arose in order to give an ancient authority to a text that was not even compiled until the 9th century or later. Wansbrough feels that the text of the Qur'an was so fluid that the multiple accounts (i.e. of the punishment stories) represent "variant traditions" of different metropolitan centres (such as Kufa, Basra, Medina etc.), and that as late as the 9th century a consonantal *textus receptus ne varietur* still had not been achieved. Today, his work is taking on greater authority within scholarly circles. But that is not material for this paper (to understand the argument see the paper on [The Problems with the Sources of Islam](#)).

Unfortunately we will never know the real story, because the originals (if indeed they ever existed) which could have told us so much were destroyed. All we have are the copies written years after the originals by those who were then ordered to destroy their originals. There are, therefore, no manuscripts to compare with to give the current Qur'an authenticity, as we have with the Bible.

For those who may wonder why this is so important, let me provide an example:

If after I had read this paper out-loud, everyone was to then write down all I had said from memory when they returned home, there would certainly be a number of variations. But we could find out these variations by putting them all together and comparing the many copies one against the other, as the same errors would not be written at the same place by everyone. The final result would be a rendering which is pretty close to what I had said originally. But if we destroyed all of the copies except one, there would be no means of comparing, and all precision would be lost. Our only hope would be that the one which remained was as close to what I had said as possible. Yet we would have no other rendering or example to really know for sure. Consequently, the greater number of copies preserved, the more certainty we would have of the original text. The Qur'an has only one doctored manuscript to go on, while the New Testament has over 24,000 manuscripts in existence, from a variety of backgrounds, from which to compare!!! Can you see the difference?!

It is therefore quite clear that that which is known as the *Textus Receptus* of the Qur'an (the text considered authoritative in the Muslim world today) cannot lay claim to be the *Textus Originalis* (the genuine original text).

The current Qur'anic text which is read throughout the Muslim world is merely Zaid's version, duly corrected where necessary, and later amended by al-Hajjaj. Consequently, the 'official' text as it currently stands was only arrived at through an extended process of amendments, recensions, eliminations and an imposed standardization of a preferred text at the initiative of one caliph, and not by a prophetic direction of divine decree.

In conclusion one can safely say that there is relative authenticity of the text in the sense that it adequately retains the gist and content of what was originally there. There is, however, no evidence to support



the cherished Muslim hypothesis that the Qur'an has been preserved absolutely intact to the last dot and letter, as so many Muslims claim (For further reading see Jam' al-Qur'an, by Gilchrist).

Yet, even if we were to let the issue rest, concerning whether or not the Qur'an which we have now is the same as that which Muhammad related to his followers, we would still need to ask whether its authority might not be impinged upon due to the numerous errors and contradictions which can be found within its pages. It is to that question that we now proceed.

## **[F] THE ABROGATION OF QUR'ANIC VERSES**

The abrogation of Qur'anic verses presents a problem for Muslims today. As we all know, people can make mistakes and correct them, but this is not the case with God. God has infinite wisdom and would not contradict Himself. The Qur'an itself admonishes against abrogation in suras 6:34 (and 10:65) which state, "...There is none that can alter the words (and decrees) of Allah." An even more damaging pronouncement is made in sura 4:82 which reads, "Do they not consider the Qur'an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancies."

Muslim authorities try to explain the internal contradictions in the Qur'an by stating that certain passages of the Qur'an are annulled (**Mansukh**) by verses revealed chronologically later, known as **Nasikh** verses. Yet, there is by no means any certainty as to which disagreeing verses are mansukh and which are nasikh, since the order in which the Qur'an was compiled was not done chronologically but according to the length of the suras.

We know that the text at our disposal was found and collated piecemeal, leaving us little hope of delineating which suras were the more authentic. Furthermore, Muslim tradition admits that many of the suras were not even given to Muhammad in one piece. According to tradition, some portions were added to other suras under the direction of Muhammad, with further additions to the former suras. Therefore, within a given sura there may be found *ayas* which were early, and others which were quite late. How then can one know which were the more authoritative?

The law of abrogation is taught by the Qur'an in **sura 2:106,108**, stating: "We substitute one revelation for another..." This is echoed in **sura 17:86**, which reads, "If it were Our Will, We could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration." In **sura 16:101** the law of abrogation is clearly defined as one verse being substituted by a better verse. Verse 101 reads, "None of our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute **something better** or similar-Knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?"

The number of abrogated verses has always been a point of discussion. Jalalu'd-Din estimated the number of abrogations at between 5 to 500. Others say it stands closer to 225. From these discrepancies one can see that the science of abrogation is an inexact science indeed, as no-one really knows how many of the verses are to be abrogated. Underlying this claim of abrogation, however, is another concern: How can a divine revelation be improved upon? Would it not have been perfect from the start?

Yusuf Ali in his defense of abrogation claims that there is a need for "progressive revelation" within scripture, saying: "its form may differ according to the needs and exigencies of the time."

Christians believe in progressive revelation as well, as God reveals and changes His will for a people as they change culturally over a period of generations. For instance, we know that God revealed through Moses His will for a particular people, in a particular time, and in a particular place. Much of God's will still remained shadowed then, but was finally revealed in Christ 1,400 years later. That is what we mean by progressive revelation.

The problem with progressive revelation in suras 2:106, 17:86 and 16:101 is that they do not refer to revelations given prior to Muhammad, but refer uniquely to the Qur'anic verses themselves. Yet, can we claim progressive revelation within a space of only 22 years (this was the time in which the Qur'an was *revealed*)? The period found in the previous scriptures spans 1,400 years! People and cultures change in that amount of time. Thus the revelations would reflect those changes. To demand the same for a revelation of a mere 22 years suggests that God is not all-knowing. The only other option can be that the recorder made corrections,

and then came up with a revelation to authenticate those corrections. To better understand the problem it might be helpful to look at some of these abrogations.

### **Some examples of these abrogations are:**

1) If the **words of Allah** cannot be **changed** (Sura 6:34,115; 10:6), then how does Allah “substitute one revelation for another” (Sura 2:106, 16:101)?

2) **Law of abrogation** (sura 2:106, 16:101) contradicts sweeping changes: in the Qibla (sura 2:115,177,124-151), pilgrimage rites (sura 2:158), dietary laws (sura 2:168-174) law of talio (sura 2:178-179), in bequests (sura 2:180-182), the fast (sura 2:182-187), and the pilgrimage again (Sura 2:196-203).

3)\* Does **Allah's day** equal to 1,000 human years (22:47, 32:5) or 50,000 human years (70:4)?

4) **Where is Allah** and his throne? Is he nearer than the jugular vein (50:16), or is he also on the throne (57:4) which is upon the water (11:7), while at the same time so far away, that it takes between 1,000 and 50,000 years to reach him (32:5, 70:4)?

5)\* Could **Allah have a son**? Sura 39:4 says he could if he wished it, yet (Sura 6:101) denies it.

6)\* Was the **earth created** in 6 days (7:54; 25:59) or 8 days (41:9-12)?

7) Muhammad will not forget the **revelations** which Allah gives him (sura 87:6-7), is then changed to withdrawing that which Allahs wills to withdraw (i.e. revelations) (17:86).

8)\* Does the **angel Gabriel** bring the revelation from Allah to Muhammad (2:97), or is it the Holy Spirit (16:102)?

9)\* If the Qur'an is in **pure Arabic** (12:2; 13:37; 16:103; 41:41,44) then why are there numerous foreign words in it (Egyptian, Acadian, Assyrian, Aramaic, Persian, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, & Ethiopian)?

10) If the **Qur'an** is in "**clear Arabic speech.**" (16:103) and "men of understanding do grasp it" (3:7), then why can "none knows its interpretation, save only Allah" (3:7)?

11) The **infinite loop** problem : Suras (26:192,195,196; 41:43-44) say the Arabic Qur'an is found in the earlier revelations (Torah and Injil), but they are written in Hebrew and Greek, and we know they don't contain all that is found in the Qur'an (41:43). Hence these earlier writings have to be contained in yet other earlier writings and we are in an infinite loop, which is absurd.

12)\* Does the newer revelation **confirm the old** (2:97) or substitute it [16:101]?

13)\* If the **Bible** is considered **authoritative** (4:136; 5:47-52,68; 10:95; 21:7; 29:46), then why is so much of it contradicted by the Qur'an (5:73-75,116; 19:7; 28:9, etc...)?

14) Allah commits himself as law to act mercifully, which implies **cause and effect** (6:12), yet later in the same sura it is he who decides everything (6:35 & 39).

15)\* In (30:2; 16:49-50) everything is devoutly **obedient to Allah**, yet what about the proud disobedience of Satan (7:11, 15:28-31, 17:61, 20:116, 38:71-74, 18:50)?

16) Is the **evil** in our life from Satan (4:117-120), from Allah (4:78), or from Ourselves (4:79)?

17)How merciful is **Allah's mercy**? He has prescribed mercy for himself (6:12), yet he does not guide some, even though he could (6:35, 14:4).

18) In (5:82),**Christians** are the nearest to the Muslims “in love”, yet in (5:51 & 57) are not Muslims told to refrain from having Christians as friends?

19) Was **Muhammad** the first to **bow down to Allah** (i.e. the first Muslim) (6:14,163; 39:12)? What about Abraham & his sons (2:132), all the earlier prophets (28:52-53), or Jesus' disciples (3:52)?

20) Only Allah is to be worshiped (4:116 and 18:110), yet are not the **Angels** commanded by Allah to **bow down** to Adam (15:29-30; and 20:116)?

21)\* Allah stipulates that those who break an **oath** do so on forfeit of their soul (48:10; 6:91-92), yet permits Muhammad to break an oath (66:1-2).

22)\* Sometimes Allah allows the greatest of all sins, **shirk** to be forgiven (4:153, 25:68-71), while at other times it is absolutely unforgivable (4:48, 116).

23) For Allah the unpardonable sin is the sin of **Shirk** (4:48, 116), yet **Abraham** committed this by initially believing the moon, sun, stars were his Lord (6:76-78).

24)\* Are all **prophets equal** (3:84;2:285;2:136), or are some elevated above the others (2:253)? [see Ali's note:289]

25) Are the **night prayers** to be done half the night or less (73:2-4), or whatever was easy to do (73:20)?

26) How many **wings** do **angels** have: 2, 3, or 4 pairs (35:1), and why does Gabriel have 600 wings (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 54, Number 455)?

27) If the **inheritance laws** provides an equal share for women and men (2:180 & 4:7), then why is it doubled for men in (4:11)?

28)\* Is the **punishment for adulteresses** life imprisonment (4:15) or 100 strokes by flogging (24:2)?

29)\* Why is it that **Homosexuals** are let off if they repent (4:16), though the same allowance is not given for heterosexuals (24:2; 4:15).

30) Why is the **punishment for adultery** for women and men equal in Sura 24 but different in Sura 4?

31) Is **retaliation** for a crime such as murder confined to people of equal rank (i.e. slave for slave) (2:178), or is it to be carried out by the heir (17:33)? [note: Ali adds Qisas and forgiving to the Arabic]

32) Can a **rich man** buy himself out of the **fast** by feeding an indigent (2:184), or is there really no compensation (2:185)?

33) If it is forbidden to adopt sons (33:4-5], then how can it be permissible to marry the wives of **adopted sons** (33:37)?

34) Can **slander** of chaste women be **forgiven**? Yes (24:4-5), No (24:23).

35) It just doesn't add up: Sura 4:11-12, 176 speaking on the **inheritance law**, specifies that when a man dies, and leaves behind [for instance] three daughters, two parents and a wife, the 3 daughters will receive 2/3 of the inheritance, 1/3 will go to the parents together [according to verse 4:11] and 1/8 for the wife [4:12] which adds up to more than the available estate. A second example: If a man leaves only his mother, his wife and two sisters, then the mother receives 1/3 (4:11), 1/4 for the wife [4:12] and 2/3 for the two sisters [4:176], which then adds up to 15/12 of the available property.

36) The **Sword verses**: Muslims are called to "fight and slay the pagan (idolaters) wherever you find them" (9:5); and "strike off their heads in battle" (47:5); and "make war on the unbeliever in Allah, until they pay tribute" (9:29); and "Fight then...until the religion be all of it Allah's" (8:39); and "a grievous penalty against those who reject faith" (9:3), while at the same time "There is no compulsion in religion" (sura 2:256).

37) Did **Noah's son** drown (11:42-43), or were Noah and his family saved from the flood (21:76; 37:75-77)?

38) Was **Noah driven out** because the people thought him possessed (54:9), or did he remain, so that they could pass him by and ridicule him (11:38)?

39)\* Did **Abraham** confront his people and smash their **idols** (21:51-59), or did he simply shut up and leave the area once he confronted them (19:41-49, 6:74-83)?

40) When **Lot** confronted the evil in his people did they ask to drive the clean men out (7:82 & 27:56), or ask for Allah's wrath on them if he was telling the truth (29:28-29)?

41)\* Were there **9 plagues**, or signs (17:101), or only 5 (7:133)? [note Ali's note: 1091 adds the rod & leprous hands, (107-108), & droughts & short crops aya 130]

42) If we are not permitted to **repent** in the face of death (4:18), then how was **Pharaoh** permitted to do so (10:90-92)?

43)\* Did the Israelites repent about making and worshiping the **golden calf** before Moses returned from the mountain (7:148-150), or until Moses came back (20:91)?

44)\* Does **Aaron** share in their guilt? No (20:85-90), yes (20:92, 7:151).

45)\* Were there several **angels** (3:42-45) announcing the birth of Jesus to **Mary**, or only one (19:17-21; 3:47)?

46) Will there be many **gardens in paradise** (18:31, 22:23, 35:33, 78:32), or just one (39:73, 41:30, 57:21, 79:41)?

47) Will there be three distinct groups of people at the **Last Judgement** (56:7), or only two (90:18-19, 99:6-8)?

50)\* On **Judgment Day** will the unjust people be given their record behind their back (84:10), or in their left hand (69:25)? [note: righteous are given it in their right hand]

51)\* If **Jesus** is raised to Allah, (4:158), and stationed near to him (3:45), but worshiped by millions of Christians, will he not **burn in hell**, since "Verily ye (Unbelievers) and the (false) gods that ye worship besides Allah are (but) fuel for Hell!" (21:98)?

52) Who takes the **souls at death**: the Angel of Death (32:11), the angels (plural) (47:27), or is it Allah (39:42)?

53)\* Did **Jesus not die** (4:157) or did he not only die, but rise again (19:33)? [note: refer to sura 19:15, which repeats the same words for Yahya]

54) Are **Jinns** and **men** created only to serve God (51:56), or are many of them **made for Hell** (7:179)?

55) If **Lust** is so thoroughly condemned as being sinful (4:135; 19:59; 28:50; 30:29; 47:15; 79:40-41) why is polygamy, divorce, and concubinage in this life permitted (4:24-25), as well as the primary, and unlimited reward in heaven (55:46-78; 56:11-39)? Surely if lust is wrong on earth and hateful to a Holy God, it cannot be pleasing to him in paradise.

56) On that same note, if **wine** is forbidden while on earth (2:219; 5:91), why then are there rivers of wine which await the faithful in paradise (47:15; 76:5; 83:25)?

57)\* Again, if **wine** is of **Satan's handiwork**. (5:90; 2:219); yet there are rivers of wine in paradise (47:15; 83:25), then how does Satan's handiwork get into Paradise?

Some of these may not be serious contradictions, were it not for the claim that the Qur'an is "**nazil**" which means "brought down" from heaven without the touch of human hand. This implies that the original "un-created" preserved tablets in heaven, from which the Qur'an proceeds (sura 85:22), also contains these abrogations. How can they then claim to be Allah's eternal word?

Equally disturbing is what this implies concerning the character of God. For, if Allah in the Qur'an manifests himself as the arbitrary God who acts as he pleases without any ties even to his own sayings, he adds a thought totally foreign to the former revelation which Muhammad claimed to confirm. Indeed, these abrogations degrade the integrity of the former revelations which were universally applicable to all peoples, for all time. The Qur'anic abrogations on the other hand fit the requirements of one specific man and his friends, for one specific place, and one specific time.

### **[G] ERRORS FOUND WITHIN THE QUR'AN**

For centuries Muslims have been taught to believe that the Qur'an has been preserved in its original Arabic form since the beginning of time itself, and preserved intact from the period of the "sending down" of the book to Muhammad 1400 years ago, right on down till the present. They have been taught that the text which we read now was uniquely inspired, in that there were no intermediary agents who could possibly pollute the integrity of the script.

At the same time they have also been taught that this suggested textual perfection of the book proves that the Qur'an must be the Word of God, as no one but Allah could have created and preserved such a perfected text. This sentiment has become so strongly established in the Muslim world that one will rarely find a Muslim scholar willing to make any critical analysis of its content or of its structure, as to do so would usually be detrimental to his or her health. However, when an analysis is made by a western scholar upon the Qur'an, that analysis is roundly castigated as being biased from the outset, and even "satanic," and therefore, unworthy of a reply. But that does not stop the analysis from being undertaken, for the Qur'an when held up to scrutiny finds itself lacking in many areas.

As already discussed, we find problems with its sources, its collation, its literary makeup, its supposed uniqueness, and problems even with its content. It is not difficult to find numerous contradictions within the Qur'an, a problem which Muslims, using the Qur'an for their authority, have attempted to alleviate by conveniently allowing for the 'law of abrogation.' But an even more devastating critique concerning the integrity of this supposed perfect 'divine book,' are the numerous errors which are found in its pages. It is therefore to those errors we will now turn in our continuing quest to ascertain whether, indeed, the Qur'an can claim to be the true, and "perfect" Word of God, as Muslims have maintained since the very inception of their faith.

### **[1] Contradictions with the Bible which point to Errors:**

Many errors are found in the Qur'an which contradict the Biblical account. In the previous section we discussed a number of these contradictions in some detail, so I won't repeat them here. Suffice it to say, that because the Qur'an followed these scriptures and made the claim to protect them (suras 6:34; 10:65; and sura 4:82) its integrity is put into doubt when it fails to adhere to the content of the very scriptures it claims to protect and confirm. Some contradictions I will mention, however, because they give doubt to the veracity of its content.

#### **a) Names confused:**

Sura 6:84-86 says, "We gave him Isaac and Jacob: all (three) We guided: and before him We guided Noah and before him We guided Noah and among his progeny David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron: thus do We reward those who do good: And Zakariya and John and Jesus and Elias: all in the ranks of the righteous: And Ismail and Elisha and Jonas and Lot: and to all We gave favor above the nations."

The disregard of any chronological order does not speak highly of its authorship. Why are David and Solomon mentioned before Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron? Why are Zechariah, John and Jesus mentioned before Elias? Why is Ishmael mentioned after Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John, Jesus and Elias; and why are Elisha and Jonah mentioned before Lot? Since the true chronological ordering of these men's lives was known hundreds of years before the Qur'an was ever written, and was in existence in documents during the time and place of the inception of the Qur'an, it is highly likely that these ayas are not the result of divine inspiration, but the result of an oral tradition, passed down erroneously.

#### **b) Moses:**

The next concerns the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's wife (in **sura 28:9**). This story contradicts the Biblical **Exodus 2:10** version, which states that it was Pharaoh's daughter who adopted Moses. It is important to note here that had Pharaoh's wife adopted Moses, he would have consequently been adopted by Pharaoh himself, making him heir to the throne. This fact alone makes the subsequent story of Moses's capture and exile rather incredulous.

#### **c) \*Yahya:**

According to the Qur'an, no-one bore the name of Yahya before John the Baptist (**sura 19:7**). Yet, we find that name mentioned in the Old Testament (**2 Kings 25:23**) implying that it was a well known name hundreds of years before the writing of the Qur'an.

It is interesting to note that Yusuf Ali, in his translation of sura 19:7 tries to circumvent this problem by translating this aya as, "on no-one by that name have We conferred distinction before." Yet, this is a case of

*eisegesis* (adding to the text what the author had not intended), as the word 'distinction' does not appear in the Arabic at all.

Is a translator permitted to change a text like this to correct an error? Obviously not! Ali is playing a dangerous game here. Is it no wonder, then, that Muslims refer to all English translations as simply interpretations. In his note (no.2461) Ali attempts to explain the problem by assuming that "Allah had, for the first time, called one of His elect by that name." It would have been better had he left the text stand as it was written.

#### **d) \*Trinity:**

The Qur'an completely misrepresents the doctrine of the Trinity. The author of sura 5:116 mistakenly thought that Christians worshipped three gods: the Father, the Mother (Mary), and the Son (Jesus). But Christians don't worship this doctrine of the Trinity at all! There was a heretical sect of Christianity called the Choloridians, who had a concept of the Trinity which included Mary, who would have been in Arabia during the time of Muhammad. They are possibly the source for this obvious error.

Another error is also found in sura 5:73-75, where the Qur'an says, "They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three..." Obviously the accusation is against Christians, yet Christians do not believe God is one of three! We believe that God is one. Yusuf Ali does a grave injustice in his translation by adding the phrase, "Allah is one of three in a trinity." The words "in a trinity" do not exist in the Arabic text! Ali puts it into his translation in an attempt to avoid the rather obvious mistake that Christians believe in three gods.

#### **e) Man's Greatness:**

Sura 4:59 states, "Greater surely than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; but most men know it not." This implies that greatness is only measured by size; that the mere vastness of the physical universe makes it greater than man, an argument which would make a football of immensely greater value than the largest diamond. Our scripture tells us that Man's greatness lies not in his size, but in his relationship with God, that he is made in God's image, a claim which no other animate or inanimate object can make.

## **[2] Internal Contradictions which point to Errors:**

Some errors point to internal contradictions within the Qur'an itself. I have dealt with these in another paper as well, and so will only list them here to jog your memory.

#### **a) Mary & Imran:**

One of the best-known errors is that concerning the confusion between Mary, recorded in the Qur'an as the sister of Aaron and the daughter of Imran (Biblical Amran) as well as the mother of Jesus (by implication in **suras 19:28; 66:12; 20:25-30**), though the two, Mary and Miriam, lived 1,570 years apart (Pfander 1935:281).

#### **b) Haman:**

Another well known passage is that of Haman. In the Qur'an Haman is referred to as a servant of Pharaoh, who built a high tower to ascend up to the God of Moses (**sura 28:38; 29:38; 40:25,38**). But the Babel tower occurs 750 years earlier (**Genesis 11**), and the name Haman is correctly found in the story of Esther in Babylon, 1,100 years after Pharaoh.

Yusuf Ali, in his commentary on these passages believes that the reference here is simply that of another Haman, yet Haman is not an Egyptian name, but uniquely Babylonian (Pfander 1835:283-284).

## **[3] Errors which Contradict Secular and Scientific Data:**

There are other stories in the Qur'an which do not stand up to the secular data which is available. These errors are possibly the most damaging for the credibility of the Qur'an as the perfect 'Word of God' because their veracity can be measured against the test of observable and obtainable data.

#### **a) Ishmael:**

The descendance of Ishmael by all Arabs is in doubt within the secular world, since historically the first father of the Arabs was **Qahtan** or **Joktan** (see Genesis 10:25-30). Some of his sons' names are still found in geographical locations in Arabia today, such as Sheba, Hazarmaveth, Ophir, and Havilah. Abraham's nephew **Lot** would be a further ancestor to the Arabs via the Moabites and Ammonites (Genesis 24); as would Jacob's twin brother **Esau**, and the six sons of Abraham's third wife **Keturah**. Yet they are not mentioned at all as ancestors to the Arabs in the Qur'an.

#### **b) \*Samaritan:**

The Qur'an says that the calf worshipped by the Israelites at mount Horeb was molded by a Samaritan (sura 20:85-87, 95-97). Yet the term 'Samaritan' was not coined until **722 B.C.**, which is several hundred years after the events recorded in Exodus (**1445 B.C.**). Thus, the Samaritan people could not have existed during the life of Moses, and therefore, could not have been responsible for molding the calf (Pfander 1835:284).

It is interesting to notice that while Yusuf Ali attempts to change this word to "Samiri" and Pickthall to "As Samirii," Arberry in the English, and Kasimirski in the French both correctly translate it "Samaritan."

Yusuf Ali, in his footnotes, "bends over backwards" to explain his choice by suggesting that the name could mean "Shemer," which denotes a stranger, or "Shomer," which means a watchman, the equivalent of "Samara" in Arabic, which he implies is close enough to the Samari he is looking for. Once again we find an awkward example of Yusuf Ali attempting to twist the translation in order to get out of a difficult scenario, similar to the examples of "Periklytos," or the word "Machmad" which he and other Muslim apologists use to signify Muhammad in the Bible. The Arabic simply does not give Ali the leeway to concoct other meanings for this word. To be consistent with the Arabic he should keep his translation consistent with the text, as Arberry and Kasimirski have done.

#### **c) Sunset:**

In **sura 18:86** we read, "Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it **set in a spring of murky water**: Near it he found a people: We said: O Dhu al Qarnayn! Either punish them, or treat them with kindness." It is well known that only the superstitious in the age of Muhammad believed that when one reaches the sun would it set in a muddy spring.

#### **d) \*Issa:**

The Qur'anic name for Jesus is "Issa" which is incorrect as Issa is the Arabic equivalent of **Esau**, the name for Jacob's twin brother. The correct Arabic name for Jesus would be **Yesuwa**, similar to the Hebrew **Yeshuwa**, yet the supposedly "all-knowing" Qur'an has no mention of it.

#### **e) \*Mountains:**

Suras **16:15; 21:31; 31:10; 78:6-7; 88:19** tell us that God placed (threw down) mountains on the earth like tent pegs to keep the earth from shaking. Many Muslims believe these verses prove the miracle of the Qur'an, since prior to the 20th century, men could not know this fact by observation alone. For pre-scientific man this would sound logical, as mountains are large and therefore, their weight would have seemingly, a stabilizing effect on the earth. Yet we now know this logic to be quite inaccurate. Mountains do not render the earth's crust stable. In fact, the very existence of mountains is evidence of instability in the earth's crust, as they are found and either pushed up by the colliding of **tectonic plates** (i.e. the migration of Arabia toward Iran has resulted in the Zagros range, France pushing against Italy produced the Alps, and the Indian plate nudging Tibet has given us the Himalayas) (Campbell 1989:170-173), or they are created by **volcanic action** (i.e. the Palisades volcanic mountain range found in the north-western coast of the U.S.). Both sets of mountains come into existence through much turbulence and shaking, contrary to what these suras contend.

Furthermore mountains do not have roots, as some Muslims contend, but due to the manner in which they are created they sit atop the earth's crust without rootage whatsoever.

There are certain Muslims who claim that the shaking is not referring to the surface of the earth but the "whole sphere of the earth"; that without the mountains the revolving movement of the earth around its axis would not be smooth, and that it would wobble much like the wobbling of an asteroid in space. How the size of the mountains could ever control the turning of the earth on its axis is quite difficult to explain, but the fact that mountains are growing every year would also negate this odd theory, since the earth has always revolved rather consistently regardless of the size of the mountain ranges.

#### **f) \*Mathematical problems:**

In sura 4:11-12 the Qur'anic law on inheritance just doesn't add up. Take my sister, whose husband just died, leaving her with three daughters and two parents. According to the sura above she must divide up his inheritance so:

verse 11 = "If there are only two daughters, two or more, their share is two-thirds of the inheritance... For parents a sixth share of the inheritance each (i.e. the two totalling one-third).

verse 12 = A...their (your wives) share...if you leave a child, they get an eighth of that which you leave..."

Thus if you add this all up you get  $2/3 + 1/6 + 1/6 + 1/8 = 1 \text{ and } 1/8!!$  This is mathematically impossible! Whomever wrote the Qur'an did not know his math!

Another example. Let's take my family. If I were to die, I would leave my mother, my wife and my two sisters. My mother would receive 1/3 according to sura 4:11, my wife would receive 1/3 according to sura 4:12, and my two sisters would receive 2/3's according to sura 4:176, which when added up equals 15/12!!

#### **g) \*Alexander the Great:**

In sura 18:83-100 we find the story of **Dhu al Qarnayn**, who is known as the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great. According to this sura, his power was given to him by Allah (aya 84), which some Muslims contend is an assertion that he had the same prominence as a prophet. But of even more importance to our discussion is the contention, according to this sura, that he was credited with building an enormous wall of iron and brass between two mountains, which was tall enough and wide enough to keep an entire army out (aya 96).

It is simple to test these claims because Alexander lived in the full light of history. Arrian, Quintus Curtius and other historians of repute have written the history of Alexander's exploits. From their writings we know that Aristotle was his tutor. Yet, these historians equivocally make him out as a heathen general whose debauchery and drunkenness contributed to his untimely death at the early age of 33 (Pfander 1835:282). They show that he was an idolater, and actually claimed to be the son of the Egyptian god Amun. How, therefore, could he be considered to have the same prominence as a prophet, or even, as aya 84 clearly asserts, that Allah was the agent for his power?

Yet, what is even more troubling is that there is no historical evidence anywhere that Alexander built a wall of iron and brass between two mountains, a feat which, indeed, would have proven him to be one of the greatest builders or engineers in the history of mankind. Certainly had he built such a structure, there would be evidence of it, or at the least documentation of its existence somewhere in the ancient manuscripts.

When we find the Qur'an so inaccurate in regard to Alexander, whose history is well known, we hesitate to accept as valuable or even as reliable the statements of the Qur'an about other matters of past history.

#### **h) Creation of Man:**

Sura 86:5-7 tells us that during the act of sexual intercourse, the "gushing fluid" or semen issues from between the loins and the ribs (Yusuf Ali translates *loins* as *backbone*). Therefore, in this sura we find that the semen which creates a child originates from the area of the body around the **back or kidney** of the male, yet we know that semen is created in the testicles. Why could the Qur'an get this so wrong? If it was metaphorically speaking then why is it so specifically referring to the source of the fluid caused by the act of intercourse? The answer is closer to hand.

The Greek physician **Hippocrates** and his followers taught in the fifth century B.C. that the semen comes from all the fluid in the body, diffusing from the brain in the spinal marrow, before passing through the kidneys and then on to the testicles and into the penis (Hippocratic Writings, Penguin Classics, 1983, pgs.317-318). This teaching would still have been popular in the 7th-9th century in the part of the world where the Qur'an was compiled.

#### **i) \*Pharaoh's Cross:**



In sura 7:124 we find Pharaoh admonishing his sorcerers because they believe in the superiority of Moses's power over theirs. This event took place in **1440 BC!** Pharaoh threatens them saying that he will cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides. He then says that they will all die on the **cross!** In sura 12:41 the baker in the story of Joseph was told that he would die on a cross as well, and the time period for this story is even earlier, **1800 BC.** But there were no crosses in those days! The earliest recording of a crucifixion was in **519 BC,** by Darius I, king of Persia, then practised by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, then extensively by the Romans close to the time of Christ, a full **921** and **1,300** years (respectively) after the two Pharaohs! Muslims maintain that Egyptians did indeed know of cross-like objects, and refer to the image of the *Ankh* as proof. Yet, all Egyptologists know that the *Ankh* was never an instrument for destruction, but was used as a symbol for fertility and life.

**ii)\* Joseph sold for a few “Dirham counted out” or “20 Shekels”?:**

In **S.12:20,** we are told that Joseph was sold by his brothers for “a few dirham counted out” = *darahim ma'duda.* This implies that coins were used. Yet there were no 'Dirhams' during the time of Muhammad's life, for the simple reason that a 'Dirham' is the Arabicized Greek 'drachme'. During the life of Muhammad the Arabs would not have had the power nor the clout to mint their own coins, and so would have been dependant on the larger trading nation's currency if they wanted to be involved in international trade (i.e. the Byzantine's who did use the Greek 'drachme', and the Sassanids who used the 'drachm' of Yezdigird III, Hormuzd IV and Khuzraw II).

This is supported by a quote from the book on the subject; 'Islamic Coins' (The Arab Bank, Express Int. Printing Co., Beirut, Lebanon), which says, "From the first Hijri year (A.D. 622) in the early days of Islam until the rule of the second Caliph, Omar, the Moslems used the Sassanian drachms of ancient Persia. These coins date back to the Sassanian dynasty right through the reign of eight monarchs from King Khosrau II (AD 590-628) to King Yazdegerd III (AD 632-651)." It goes on to say, "In the 8th year of the reign of the Caliph Omar the Moslems began coining Dirhams in a number of provincial mints located in the following towns: Sijistan, Merv, Nahr Tira, El-Rayy, Arran, Istakhr, Basrah, Herat, hamadhan and Darabjird."

We know that **Omar** came to power in 634 AD, so these 'Dirhams' were not introduced until **642 AD,** or ten years after the death of Muhammad. By this time the Arabs had conquered Baghdad, Basrah, Damascas, Jerusalem, and Cairo, so it would make sense that they would want to introduce their own coinage, with the commonly recognized Sassanid coin '**Drachms**' **Arabicized to 'Dirhams'** in order to substantiate and solidify their authority.

What we can glean from this are a number of salient points: first that the verse referring to Joseph being sold for a few 'Dirhams' in Sura 12:20, not only historically telescopes a coinage introduced in the mid-seventh century AD back to the **19th century BC** (2400 years earlier), but it assumes that coins were employed in a time when only weighted bullion was used (as the 4<sup>th</sup> century historian Herodotus informs us that it was the Lydian Kings who created coins in **700BC.** These are indeed damaging.

However, more importantly, and possibly more troubling for the Muslim apologist, if we accept that Dirhams were not introduced until 642 AD, then sura 12:20 would have had to have been written at least ten years after the death of Muhammad, and at least eight years after the first redaction of the Qur'an was written down, which according to Bukhari took place during the time of Abu Bakr (see 'Sahih al-Bukhari', Vol. 6:509, pg. 478-479). It is quite possible that this entire Sura was not introduced until much later, once the Dirham was well established, or at least as late as the second recension of the Caliph Uthman (sometime after 650 AD), which Bukhari also speaks about (see 'Sahih alBukhari', Vol. 6:510, pg.479).

Historical evidence once again helps us establish doubt for the authority of the Qur'an; yet, simultaneously provides us with veracity for our own Biblical text.

Consider: If we have our figures right than the **Biblical** account which states that Joseph was sold for **20 shekels of silver (Gen 37:27,28)** is quite historical in that the Shekel is not a coin but a **unit of measurement** (i.e. 20 shekels equals about 8 ounces, or **0.2 kilograms of silver**). Interestingly, the author of Genesis would have had to have written this before coins were introduced in the 7th century BC. Furthermore, the **shekel** is historically correct in that this form of money was borrowed from the **Babylonians,** who, according to the Encyclopaedia Judaica, used this form of currency as far back as 'the **third millenium B.C.** [when] one already finds this unit of weight in Babylonia'. Since Joseph would not have lived until the early part of the second millenium, we now can understand why this form of financial barter was employed in that

part of the world, supporting the authenticity of the Genesis 37 account while eradicating credibility for the Sura 12 story.

**k) Other Scientific problems:**

-sura 16:66 How can cow's milk comes from between the excrement and the blood of the cow's abdomen.

-In sura 16:69 we are told that honey, which gives healing, comes out of the bees abdomen. Again, what does it mean that honey comes out of a bees abdomen?

-sura 6:38 says that all animals and flying beings form communities, like humans. Would this include spiders, where in some species the female eats the male after mating has taken place. Is that a community like ours?

-sura 25:45-46 maintains that it is the sun which moves to create shadows. Yet, I have always been taught that it was the rotation of the earth which caused shadows to move, while the sun remained quite stationary.

-\*sura 17:1 says Muhammad went to the "farthest Mosque" during his journey by night (the **Mi'raj**), which Muslims explain was the Dome of the Rock mosque, in Jerusalem. But there was no mosque in Jerusalem during the life of Muhammad as Islam had not yet reached Palestine. This was not accomplished until 641 A.D., well after the death of Muhammad. Furthermore, this mosque could not be the Dome of the Rock, as it was not built until 691 A.D., by the Amir `Abd al Malik, a full 58 years after Muhammad's death! If you were to study the Dome of the Rock, you would notice right away that it could not even qualify as a mosque as it has no Qibla (direction of prayer).

Finally, it could not be the Jewish temple of Jerusalem as there was no temple in existence at that time. The temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Roman emperor Titus 570 years before this vision (possibly in 624 A.D.) conceivably ever took place. So what was this mosque Muhammad supposedly saw?

**[4] Absurdities:**

There are other errors which are statements or stories which simply make no sense at all, and put into question the integrity of the writer or writers of the Qur'an.

**a) \*7 Earths:**

Sura 65:12 reads, "It is God who hath created seven heavens and as many earths." We would love to know where the other six earths are. If these refer to the planets in our solar system, then they are short by two (and now possibly three).

**b) \*Jinns & Shooting stars:**

Meteors, and even stars are said to be missiles fired at eavesdropping Satans and jinn who seek to listen to the reading of the Qur'an in heaven, and then pass on what they hear to men in suras 15:16-18; **37:6-10**; 55:33-35; 67:5; **72:6-9** & 86:2-3.

How are we to understand these suras? Can we believe indeed that Allah throws meteors, which are made up of carbon dioxide or iron-nickel, at non-material devils who steal a hearing at the heavenly council? And how do we explain the fact that many of earths meteors come in showers which consequently travel in parallel paths. Are we to thus understand that these parallel paths imply that the devils are all lined up in rows at the same moment?

**c) Solomon's power over nature:**

1) **birds and ants:** King Solomon was taught the speech of birds (sura 27:16) and the speech of ants (sura 27:18-19). In his battles, he used birds extensively to drop clay bricks on Abrah's army (sura 105:3-4), and marched them in military parades (sura 27:17). He also used them to bring him messages of powerful queens (sura 27:20-27). Note: According to the historical record, Abrah's army was not defeated by bricks dropped on their head. Rather, they withdrew their attack on Mecca after smallpox broke out among the troops (Guillame, Islam, pgs.21ff).

2) **Jinn:** The Jinn were forced to work for Solomon, making him whatever he pleased, such as palaces, statues, large dishes, and brass fountains (sura 34:11-13). A malignant jinn was even commissioned by Solomon to bring the Queen of Sheba's throne in the twinkling of an eye (sura 27:38-44).

3) **Wind:** The wind was subject to Solomon, travelling a month's journey both in the morning and in the evening (though the wisdom of its timing is somehow lost in translation) (sura 3:11; 21:81).

4) **Ants talk:** The ants in Sura 27:18, upon seeing Solomon and his army arriving in their valley (and by implication recognizing who he was), talk among themselves, deciding to flee underground so as not to be crushed.

#### **d) Youth and dog sleep 309 years:**

Sura 18:9-25 tells the story of some youths (the exact number is debated) and a dog who sleep for 309 years with their eyes open and their ears closed (Note Yusuf Ali's strained attempts to delineate the exact time period of this story in footnote no.2365, and then concludes that it is merely a parable).

The object of this story is to show Allah's power to keep those who trust in him, including the dog, without food or water for as long as he likes. What is quite interesting is that this story, because of its parallels, was probably borrowed from an account by Gregory of Tours, called The Story of Martyrs, a compilation of tales, much of which is spurious, concerning the persecution of earlier Christians.

#### **e) People become apes:**

In suras 2:65-66 and 7:163-167, Allah turns certain fishing people who break the Jewish sabbath into apes for their disobedience. Had Darwin read the Qur'an, his theory on evolution may have paralleled "Planet of the Apes" rather than the other way around.

#### **f) Sodom & Gomorrah turned upside-down:**

In suras 11:81-83; 15:74 the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are turned upside-down and rained upon with clay-like brimstone, upon whose surface were marked the destiny of the wicked people who lived there.

#### **g) Jacob's smell & sight:**

In sura 12:93-96 Joseph sends his coat to his father as proof of his existence. But as the caravan leaves Egypt, Jacob, who is in Canaan smells Joseph, who is hundreds of miles away (aya 94). Then the coat, when it arrives, is placed over the face of his father Jacob and suddenly he receives his sight. Now we know why Andrew Lloyd Weber added the word "amazing" to the title of his musical, "Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Coat."

#### **h) Night/Day/Sun/Moon are subject to man:**

In sura 16:12-15 the day and night as well as the Sun and Moon are surprisingly all made subject to man. That would imply that we had control over the rotation of our planet, as well as the entire movement of our solar system (Yusuf Ali's explanation of this odd pronouncement in note no.2031 is rather interesting).

### **[5] Grammatical Errors:**

Muslims believe that since the Qur'an is the Word of God, it is without error in all areas. We have already dealt with the questions concerning the style and literary qualities of the Qur'an earlier, and found it to be quite defective in those areas. Yet, even more troubling are the grammatical mistakes which exist within its text. Can we expect an omnipotent and omniscient God to allow such deficiencies to creep into his supposedly 'perfect' and eternal revelation? Consider the following grammatical problems:

1) In **sura 2:177**, the word **Sabireen** should be **Sabiroon** because of its position in the sentence (it should follow the same grammatical structure as **al mufoon** "to fulfill" in sura 2:150).

\*2) In **sura 3:59**, the words **Kun feekunu** (which is the present tense) should be written, **Kun fakaana** (the past tense) as "Be, and it **was**" must be in the past tense. Why is it written in the present, yet then translated into the past?

3) In **sura 4:162**, the phrase "And (especially) those who establish regular prayer..." is written as **al Muqiyhina al salaat**, which again is in the feminine plural form, instead of the masculine plural: **al Muqiyhuna al salaat** (?). It is important to note that the two following phrases, "(those who) practice regular charity, and (those who) believe in Allah..." are both correctly written in the masculine human plural form.

\*4) In **sura 5:69**, the title **al Sabioon**, referring to the Sabians, should agree with "those who believe and those who practice charity," and thus should be written **al Sabieen** (see also **sura 2:62**=Sabieen, and **sura 22:17**=Sabieen).

5) In **sura 7:160**, the phrase "We divided them into twelve tribes," is written in the feminine plural: **Uthnati** (feminine) **Ashrati** (feminine) **Asbaataan**. Due to the fact that it refers to a number of people, it should have been written in the masculine plural form: **Uthnaiy** (masculine) **Ashara Sibtaan**.

6) In **sura 63:10**, the phrase "I shall be" is written **akun**. Yet since it is a negative statement it should be written in the negative form= **akunu**.

There are other grammatical errors which exist in the Qur'an as well, such as: suras 2:192; 13:28; 20:66 and the duals which replace the plurals in sura 55 (Pfander 1835:264).

If we are still in doubt as to whether the Qur'an is subject to error, it might be helpful to end this section by quoting a Muslim scholar, who, himself, comments on this very problem concerning grammatical mistakes in the Qur'an:

*The Qur'an contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully intelligible without the aid of commentaries; foreign words, unfamiliar Arabic words, and words used with other than the normal meaning; adjectives and verbs inflected without observance of the concords of gender and number; illogically and ungrammatically applied pronouns which sometimes have no referent; and predicates which in rhymed passages are often remote from the subjects... To sum up, more than one hundred Qur'anic aberrations from the normal rules and structure of Arabic have been noted (Ali Dashti, 23 Years, pgs.48-50).*

## **[H] THE SOURCES OF BIBLICAL AND NON-BIBLICAL TALES FOUND IN THE QUR'AN:**

In the earlier sections of this paper we discussed the problems which we observed concerning the claims which Muslims make towards their Qur'an. We noted the haphazard means by which the Qur'an was collected, and were appalled by the many abrogations and errors which exist in this supposedly "perfect" word of Allah. We came to the conclusion that the book could be nothing more than a man-made piece of literature, which could not stand alongside the great literary compositions that we have in our possession today. Yet, we found it troubling that there were so many inadequacies with this most 'holy book' for the Muslims.

As we approached the study on the collation of the Qur'an, we were shocked by the glaring deficiencies which were evidenced in its collection, forcing us to conclude that much of its content must have been added to much later.

If this be so, we are now left with the question as to where the author or authors went for their material? Where were the sources for many of these Biblical stories and ideas which we find in the Qur'an?

When we read the Qur'an we are struck by the large number of Biblical stories within its pages. Yet, these stories have little parallel with that which we read in our Bible. The Qur'anic accounts include many distortions, amendments, and some bizarre additions to that which we have heard our parents read to us at devotional times. So, where did these stories come from, if not from the previous scriptures?

Upon reading and observing these dubious teachings in the Qur'an we are forced to ask whether they contain stories which have parallels in pre-Islamic writings which were of questionable authenticity? If so, then we should be able to find these "apocryphal" accounts and compare them with that which we read in the Qur'an.

Fortunately, we do have much Jewish apocryphal literature (much of it from the **Talmud**), dating from the second century A.D. with which we can compare many of these stories. It is when we do so, that we find remarkable similarities between these fables or folk tales, and the stories which are recounted in the Qur'an.

The **Talmudic** writings were compiled in the second century A.D., from oral laws (**Mishnah**) and traditions of those laws (**Gemara**). These laws and traditions had been created to adapt the law of Moses (the **Torah**) to the changing times. They also included interpretations and discussions of the laws (the **Halakhah** and **Haggadah** etc.). Many Jews do not consider the Talmudic writings authoritative, but use them as windows to understand the times in which they were written.

So how did these non-authoritative Talmudic writings come to be a part of the Qur'an? In the Arabian Peninsula (known as the **Hijaz**), during the seventh century many Jewish communities could be found. They were part of the diaspora who had fled Palestine after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. A large number of these Jews were guided by these Talmudic writings which had been passed down orally from father to son for generations. Each generation embellished the accounts, or at times incorporated local folklore, so that it was difficult to know what the original stories contained. There were even those amongst the Jews who believed that these Talmudic writings had been added to the "preserved tablets" (i.e. the Ten Commandments, and the Torah which were kept in the Ark of the Covenant), and were believed to be replicas of the heavenly book.

When Muhammad came onto the scene, in the seventh century, some scholars believe he merely added to this body of literature the Qur'an. It is therefore, not surprising that a number of these traditions from Judaism were inadvertently accepted by Muhammad, or perhaps later redactors, and incorporated into the religion of Islam.

Those who are critical of these sources, yet who adhere to Muslim Tradition, and consider Muhammad as the 'originator' of the Qur'an contend that many of these stories came to Muhammad via the Jewish friends which he had in Medina. We do know from Muslim tradition that Khadija's cousin, Waraqa, translated portions of the Gospels into Arabic, and that Buhaira, a Nestorian monk, was his secret teacher (Tisdall, pg.15).

Muslim Tradition also maintains that Muhammad's seventh wife, Raihana, and his ninth wife, Safiyya, were Jewesses. Furthermore, his first wife, Khadija, had a Christian background. His eighth wife, Maryam, also belonged to a Christian sect. It is likely that these wives shared with him much of their Old and New Testament literature, their dramas, and their prophetic stories.

Whether these wives understood the distinction between authentic Biblical literature and that which was apocryphal is not known. They would not have been literary scholars, but would have simply related the stories they had heard from their local communities, much of which was Talmudic in origin, as we shall soon see.

Another scenario is that many of the corresponding stories which we find in the Qur'an are from a later date (towards the end of the eighth century, or 100-150 years after the death of Muhammad), and have little to do with Muhammad. They were possibly written by later Persian or Syrian redactors (belonging to the Ummayyad and Abyssid dynasties of the later seventh and eighth centuries), who simply borrowed stories from their own oral traditions (Persian Zoroastrians, or Byzantine Christians) as well as stories from the apocryphal Jewish literature which would have been around at that time. They then simply telescoped, or redacted back the stories onto the figure of Muhammad in the early seventh century.

Whatever is the case, the Qur'anic accounts do have interesting parallels with the Jewish apocryphal literature from the second century A.D. Let's then look at a few of these accounts, and compare them with the parallels which we find in other co-existing, or pre-dating literature of that period.

## **[1] STORIES WHICH CORRESPOND WITH BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS:**

### **[A] Satan's Refusal to Worship Adam:**

In suras 2:34 and 17:61 we find Satan (**Iblis**, who may be a fallen angel, or a jinn, according to sura 18:50) refusing to bow down to Adam. This story can be traced back to the second century Talmud.

### **[B] Cain and Abel:**

A better example is the story of Cain and Abel in sura 5:27-32: The story begins much as it does in our own Biblical account with Cain killing his brother Abel (though they are not named in the Qur'anic account). Yet in aya 31, after Cain slays Abel, the story changes and no longer follows the Biblical account (see sura 5:30-32 written out below, on the left). Where could this Qur'anic account have come from? Is this an historical record which is unknown to the Biblical writers?

Indeed it was, as the source for this account was drafted after the New Testament was written. In fact there are 3 sources from which this account could have been taken: the Targum of Jonathan-ben-Uzziah, The Targum of Jerusalem, and a book called The Pirke-Rabbi Eleazar. All these 3 documents are Jewish writings from the Talmud, which were oral traditions from between 150-200 A.D. These stories comment on the Laws of the Bible, yet are known to contain nothing more than Hebrew myths and fables.

As we read this particular story from these 3 sources (on the right; due to the lack of space I have simply reprinted the account found in the Targum of Jonathan-ben-Uzziah) we find a striking parallel to the Qur'anic account from Sura 5:31 (on the left):

### **Our'an- sura 5:31**

*Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. 'Woe is me!' said he; 'Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother?' Then he became full of regrets.*

### **Targum of Jonathan-ben-Uzziah**

*Adam and Eve, sitting by the corpse, wept not knowing what to do, for they had as yet no knowledge of burial. A raven came up, took the dead body of its fellow, and having scratched at the earth, buried it thus before their eyes. Adam said, 'Let us follow the example of the raven,' so taking up Abel's body, buried it at once.*

Apart from the contrast between who buried who, the two stories are otherwise uncannily similar. We can only conclude that it was from here that Muhammad, or a later author obtained their story. Thus we find that a Jewish fable, a myth, is repeated as historical fact in the Qur'an. Yet that is not all, for when we continue

in our reading of sura 5, in the following aya 32 (on the left), we find a further proof of plagiarism from apocryphal Jewish literature; this time the Jewish Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 (on the right).

### Qur'an- sura 5:32

On that account: *We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land-it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people...*

### Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

*We find it said in the case of Cain who murdered his brother, 'the voice of thy brother's blood crieth out' [this latter is a quote from the Bible, Genesis 4:10], and he says, 'it does not sayeth he hath blood in the singular, but bloods in the plural.'*

*Thou was created single in order to show that to him who kills a single individual, it should be reckoned that he has slain the whole race. But to him who has preserved the life of a single individual, it is counted that he has preserved the whole race.*

There is no connection between the previous verse (aya 31) and that which we have just read (sura 5:32 above). What does the death of Abel by Cain have to do with the slaying or saving of the whole people? Nothing. Ironically, this aya 32, in fact, supports the basis of the Old Testament hope for the finished work of Jesus, who was to take away the sins of the world (see John 1:29). Yet, it doesn't flow from the verse which preceded it. So why is it here?

If we were to turn to the Jewish Talmud again, this time to the Mishnah Sanhedrin, chapter 4, verse 5 (above, on the right), we will find where the author obtained his material, and why he included it here.

In this account we read a Rabbi's comments, where he interprets the word 'blood' to mean, "his own blood and the blood of his seed." Remember, this is nothing but the comment of a Rabbi. It is his own interpretation, and one which is highly speculative at that.

Therefore, it is rather interesting that he then goes on to comment on the plural word for 'blood.' Yet this Rabbi's comments are repeated almost word-for-word in the Qur'an, in aya 32 of sura 5! How is it that a Rabbi's comments on the Biblical text, the muses of a mere human become the Qur'anic holy writ, and attributed to God? Did Allah learn something from the Rabbi, or was it Muhammad or a later author who learned this admonition from this Rabbi's writings?

The only conclusion is that the later is the case, because there is no connection between the narrative concerning the killing of Cain in the Qur'an (aya 31), and the subsequent verse about the whole race (aya 32).

It is only when we read the Mishnah Sanhedrin that we find the connection between these two stories: a Rabbi's exposition of a biblical verse and a core word. The reason why this connection is lacking in the Qur'an is now quite easy to understand. The author of sura 5 simply did not know the context in which the Rabbi was talking, and therefore was not aware that these were merely comments on the Biblical text and not from the Bible itself. He simply added them to the Qur'an, repeating what he had heard without understanding the implication.

It is rather ironic that in **sura 25:4-5** this very charge of haphazard plagiarism is leveled at Muhammad by the unbelievers in Medina:

*"But the unbelievers say: 'Naught is this but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it.' In truth, it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a falsehood. And they say: 'Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written: and they are dictated before him morning and evening.'"*

This charge rings closer to the truth than many Muslims are willing to admit. It seems that those who did not believe in Muhammad or in the later redactions, recognized the sources for these stories, since they had undoubtedly heard the same myths and fables from the Jews who were not only living in that area at that time, but came from the surrounding countries to the fairs at Mecca and other trading towns in the **Hijaz**.

It seems quite obvious that the Qur'an cannot be accepted as the word of God, if there exists parallels in its narratives which exist from myths and commentaries of other religions, such as we find here.

### **[C] Abraham:**

In sura 21:51-71, we find the story of Abraham (due to its length, it is not written here-you can read it for yourself). In the Qur'anic account Abraham confronts his people and his father because of the many idols which they worship. After an argument between Abraham and the people, they depart and Abraham breaks the smaller idols, leaving the larger ones intact. When the people see this they call Abraham and ask if he is responsible, to which he replies that it must have been the larger idols which did the destruction. He challenges them to ask the larger idols to find out, to which they reply, "Thou knowest full well that these (idols) do not speak!" (aya 65). He gives a taunting retort, and they then throw him into a fire. But in aya 69 Allah commands the fire to be cool, making it safe for Abraham, and he miraculously walks out unscathed.

There are no parallels to this story in our Bible. There is a parallel, however, in a second century book of Jewish folktales called The Midrash Rabbah. In this account Abraham breaks all the idols except the biggest one. His father and the others challenged him on this, and with an added bit of humour, which is missing in the Qur'anic account, Abraham responds by saying that he had given the biggest idol an ox for all the idols to eat, but because the smaller idols went ahead and ate, they thus did not show respect. The bigger idol consequently smashed the smaller idols. The enraged father did not believe Abraham's account, and so took him to a man named Nimrod, who simply threw him into a fire. But God made it cool for him and he walked out unscathed.

The similarity between these two stories is quite unmistakable. A second century Jewish fable, a folklore, and myth is repeated in the "holy Qur'an." It is quite evident that Muhammad or another author heard this story from the Jews, but because he could not read their books, though he had heard snatches of the Biblical narratives, from visiting Jews, or even his wives, he simply assumed they came from the same source, and unwittingly wrote Jewish folklore into his Qur'an.

Some Muslims claim that this myth, and not the Biblical account, is in reality the true Word of God. They maintain that the Jews simply expunged it so as not to correspond with the later Qur'anic account. Without attempting to explain how the Jews would have known to expunge this very story, since the Qur'an was not to appear until centuries later, we nonetheless must ask where this folklore comes from?

The Bible itself gives us the answer. In Genesis 15:7, the Lord tells Abraham that it was He who brought Abraham out of **Ur** of the Chaldeans. Ur is a place, also mentioned in Genesis 11:31. We have evidence that a Jewish scribe named **Jonathan Ben Uziel** mistook the Hebrew word "Ur" for the Hebrew word which means "fire." Thus in his commentary of this verse he writes, "I am the Lord who brought you to of the **fire** of the Chaldeans."

Consequently, because of this misunderstanding, and because of a misreading of the Biblical verse a fable became popular around this era, which stated that God had brought Abraham out of the fire. With this information in hand, we can, therefore, discern where the Jewish fable originated: from a misunderstanding of one word in a Biblical verse by one errant scribe. Yet, somehow this errant understanding found its way into God's "holy" word in the Qur'an.

It is obvious from these examples that the author of the Qur'an simply repeated what he had heard, and not being able to distinguish between that which he heard and that which was Biblical truth, he simply compiled them side-by-side in the Qur'an.

### **[D] Mt Sanai:**



The story which is found in sura 7:171 of God lifting up Mount Sinai and holding it over the heads of the Jews as a threat to squash them if they rejected the law is not recognizable from the Biblical account. And well it should not be, for it hails from another second century apocryphal Jewish book, The Abodah Sarah.

### **[E] Solomon and Sheba:**

In sura 27:17-44 we read the story of Solomon, the Hoopoo bird and the Queen of Sheba. After reading the Qur'anic account of Solomon in sura 27 (on the left), it would be helpful to compare it with the account (on the right) taken from a Jewish folklore, the II Targum of Esther, which was written in the second Century A.D., nearly five hundred years before the creation of the Qur'an (Tisdall 1904:80-88; Shorrosh 1988:146-150):

#### **Qur'an- sura 27:17-44**

*(aya 17) And before Solomon were marshalled his hosts-of Jinns and men, and birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks.*

*(aya 20) And he took a muster of the Birds; and he said: `Why is it I see not the Hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees?*

*(aya 21) I will certainly punish him with a severe penalty, or execute him, unless he bring me a clear reason (for absence).*

*(aya 22) But the Hoopoe tarried not far: he (came up and) said: `I have compassed (territory) which thou hast not compassed, and I have come to thee from Saba with tidings true.*

*(aya 23) I found (there) a woman ruling over them and provided with every requisite; and she has a magnificent throne...*

*(aya 27) (Solomon) said: `Soon shall we see whether thou hast told the truth or lied!*

*(aya 28) Go thou, with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them: then draw back from them, and (wait to) see what answer they return."*

*(aya 29) (The queen) said: "Ye chiefs! Here is-delivered to me-a letter worthy of respect.*

*(aya 30) It is from Solomon, and is (as follows): `In the name of Allah, most Gracious, Most Merciful: Be ye not arrogant against me, but come to me in submission (to the true Religion)."*

*(aya 32) She said: "Ye chiefs! Advise me in (this) my affair: no affair have I decided except in your presence."*

*(aya 33) They said: "We are endued with strength, and given to vehement war: but the command is*

#### **II Targum of Esther**

*"Solomon...gave orders...I will send King and armies against thee...(of) Genii [jinn] beasts of the land the birds of the air.*

*Just then the Red-cock (a bird), enjoying itself, could not be found; King Solomon said that they should seize it and bring it by force, and indeed he sought to kill it.*

*But just then, the cock appeared in the presence of the King and said, "I had seen the whole world (and) know the city and kingdom (of Sheba) which is not subject to thee, My Lord King. They are ruled by a woman called the Queen of Sheba. Then I found the fortified city in the Eastlands (Sheba) and around it are stones of gold and silver in the streets." By chance the Queen of Sheba was out in the morning worshipping the sea, the scribes prepared a letter, which was placed under the bird's wing and away it flew and (it) reached the Fort of Sheba. Seeing the letter under its wing (Sheba) opened it and read it.*

*"King Solomon sends to you his Salaams. Now if it please thee to come and ask after my welfare, I will set thee high above all. But if it please thee not, I will send kings and armies against thee."*

*The Queen of Sheba heard it, she tore her garments, and sending for her Nobles asked their advice. They knew not Solomon, but advised her to send vessels by the sea, full of beautiful ornaments and gems...also to send a letter to him.*

*When at last she came, Solomon sent a messenger...to meet her...Solomon, hearing she had come, arose and sat down in the palace of glass. When the Queen of Sheba saw it, she thought the glass floor was water, and so in crossing over lifted up her garments. When Solomon seeing the hair*

*with thee; so consider what thou wilt command."*

*about her legs, (He) cried out to her..."*

*(aya 35) She said..."But I am going to send him a present, and (wait) to see with what (answer) return (my) ambassadors."*

*(aya 42) So when she arrived, (aya 44) she was asked to enter the lofty Palace: but when she saw it, she thought it was a lake of water, and she (tucked up her skirts), uncovering her legs. He said: "This is but a palace paved smooth with slabs of glass."*

It is rather obvious, once you have read the two accounts above, where the author of the story of Solomon and Sheba in the Qur'an obtained his data. The two stories are uncannily similar. The jinns, the birds, and in particular the messenger bird, which at first he could not find, yet then used as a liaison between himself and the Queen of Sheba, along with the letter and the glass floor, are unique to these two accounts. One will not find these parallels in the Biblical passages at all.

#### **[F] Mary, Imran and Zachariah:**

In sura 3:35-37 we find the story concerning Mary, her father Imran, and the priest Zachariah. After reading the passage from the Qur'an (on the left), notice the similarities between the Qur'anic story and that found in a spurious gospel account from The Proto-evangelion's James the Lesser, which is a second century A.D. apocryphal Christian fable (on the right).

#### **Qur'an- sura 3:35-37**

*(aya 35) Behold! a woman of Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: so accept this of me: for Thou hearest and knowest all things."*

*(aya 36) When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!" And Allah knew best what she brought forth- "And no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to thy protection from the Evil One, the Rejected."*

*(aya 37) Right graciously did her Lord accept her; He made her grow in purity and beauty: to the care of Zakariya was she assigned.*

#### **The Proto-evangelion's James the Lesser**

*And Anna (wife of Joachim) answered, 'As the Lord my God liveth, whatever I bring forth, whether it be male or female, I will devote it to the Lord my God, and it shall minister to him in holy things, during its whole life'...and called her name Mary...And the high-priest received her; and blessed her, and said, 'Mary, the Lord God hath magnified thy name to all generations, and to the very end of time by thee will the Lord shew his redemption to the children of Israel."*

Both accounts speak of the child being either male or female. They also mention that the child is Mary, and that she is protected by either a high-priest, or Zachariah, who is inferred as the keeper of the sanctuary, where Mary is kept (though the Lukan account speaks of him as the father of John the Baptist).

#### **[G] Jesus's Birth:**

There are a number of accounts in the Qur'an which speak of the early childhood of Jesus. These accounts do not correspond at all with the Biblical story. But they do have parallels with other apocryphal Jewish documents. Take for example the three references below:

**1) The Palm Tree:**

In sura 19:22-26 we read the story of Mary, the baby Jesus, the Palm Tree, and the rivulet which flows below it. This story is not found in the Bible, but first appeared in an apocryphal fable of the second century A.D. (see passage on the right; from The Lost Books of the Bible, New York, Bell Publishing Co., 1979, pg.38). Notice the similarities between the two accounts.

### **Qur'an- sura 19:22-26**

*So she conceived him [Jesus], and she retired with him to a remote place.*

*And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree: She cried (in her anguish): 'Ah! would that I had died before this! would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!'*

*But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm tree): 'Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee:*

*And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm tree; it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee.*

*So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye.*

### **The Lost Books of the Bible**

*Now on the third day after Mary was wearied in the desert by the heat, she asked Joseph to rest for a little under the shade of a Palm Tree. Then Mary looking up and seeing its branches laden with fruit (dates) said, 'I desire if it were possible to have some fruit.' Just then the child Jesus looked up (from below) with a cheerful smile, and said to the Palm Tree, 'Send down some fruit.' Immediately the tree bent itself (toward her) and so they ate. Then Jesus said, 'O Palm Tree, arise; be one of my Father's trees in Paradise, but with thy roots open the fountain (rivulet) beneath thee and bring water flowing from that fount.'*

### **2) The Baby Jesus talking:**

Later on in the same sura (19) in verses 29-33 we find that the baby Jesus can talk. Nowhere in the Bible, except for the account of Jesus disputing with the elders in the temple (a story which comes when Jesus has grown into a young boy) does the baby Jesus talk. So where did the story originate? Again, we must turn to 2nd century apocryphal writings; this time to an Arabic apocryphal fable from Egypt, named The first Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ to find the same story:

### **Qur'an- sura 19:29-33**

*But she pointed to the babe. They said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?'*

*He said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet;*

*And He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live;*

*He hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable;*

*So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!*

### **The first Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ**

*...Jesus spake even when he was in the cradle, and said to his mother: 'Mary, I am Jesus the Son of God. That word which thou didst bring forth according to the declaration of the angel...*

### **3) Creating birds from clay:**

Jesus, according to sura 3:49 breathed life into birds of clay. The source for this Qur'anic fiction is found in the earlier Thomas' Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ, another apocryphal fable from the 2nd century:

## Qur'an- sura 3:49

*"And (appoint him [Jesus]) a messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): 'I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave...'"*

## Thomas' Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ

*"Then he took from the bank of the stream some soft clay, and formed out of it twelve sparrows...Then Jesus clapping together the palms of his hands called to the sparrows, and said to them: 'Go, fly away.'"*

### [H] Heaven and Hell:

There are Qur'anic accounts which deal with heaven and hell, which have no parallels with our Biblical accounts. It is not difficult, however, to find out where these stories originated. Take for instance the following:

#### 1) 7 Heavens and 7 Hells:

In suras 15:43-44 and 17:44 we find reference to the seven hells and the seven heavens. Without asking where these seven heavens and hells are located, it will be helpful to note that the same number of hells and heavens can be found in the tradition from that period called Jagigah and Zuhal.

#### 2) Mi'raj:

In sura 17:1 we have the report of Muhammad's journey by night from the Sacred mosque to the farthest mosque. From later traditions we know this aya is referring to Muhammad ascending up to the 7th Heaven, after a miraculous night journey (the Mi'raj) from Mecca to Jerusalem, on a "horse" called Buraq.

More detail is furnished us in the Mishkat al Masabih. We can trace the story back to a fictitious book called The Testament of Abraham, written around 200 B.C., in Egypt, and then translated into Greek and Arabic.

Another account is that of The Secrets of Enoch, which predates Muhammad by four centuries. In chapter 1:4-10 and 2:1 we read:

*On the first day of the month I was in my house and was resting on my couch and slept and when I was asleep great distress came up into my heart and there appeared two men. They were standing at my couch and called me by name and I arose from my sleep. Have courage, Enoch, do not fear; The Eternal God sent us to thee. Thou shalt today ascend with us into heaven. The angels took him on their wings and bore him up to the first heaven.*

A further account is largely modelled on the story contained in the old Persian book entitled Arta-i Viraf Namak. This story recounts how a pious young Zoroastrian ascended to the skies, and, upon his return, related what he had seen, or professed to have seen (Pfander 1835:295-296).

#### 3) Hell:

The Qur'anic description of Hell resembles the descriptions of hell in the Homilies of Ephraim, a Nestorian preacher of the sixth century (Glubb, pg.36)

#### 4) Balance:

The author of the Qur'an in suras 42:17 and 101:6-9, utilized The Testament of Abraham to teach that a scale or balance will be used on the day of judgment to weigh good and bad deeds in order to determine whether one goes to heaven or to hell.

#### 5) Paradise:

The description of Paradise in suras 55:56-58 and 56:22-24,35-37, which speak of the righteous being rewarded with wide-eyed houris with eyes like pearls, has interesting parallels in the Zoroastrian religion of Persia, though the name for the maidens in Persia is not houris, but Paaris.

## **[2] STORIES WHICH DO NOT CORRESPOND WITH THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT:**

There are other stories which do not necessarily follow any Biblical accounts, but which have astonishing similarities with further apocryphal Jewish literature from the second century.

### **[A] Harut and Marut:**

In sura 2:102 the two angels Harut and Marut are mentioned. Who exactly are these two characters? While Yusuf Ali believes these were angels who lived in Babylon, historical records show us that they were Armenian idols. Their existence was inspired by Marut, the Hindu god of the wind. We find this story related in the Talmud (Midrash Yalzut, chapter 44).

### **[B] The Cave of 7 Sleepers:**

The story which was mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, concerning the 7 sleepers and a dog who slept for 309 years in a cave, is found in sura 18:9-25. It has a striking resemblance to a book called The Story of Martyrs, by Gregory of Tours. In this account it is a legendary tale of Christians who were under persecution, and who fell asleep in a cave for 200 years. Others believe it came from a legend which a heathen Greek writer, Diogenes Laertius, compiled in 200 A.D. It speaks of a certain Epimenides, a heathen Greek boy, who slept for many years in a cave. It was known as a tale to amuse children (Pfander 1835:285).

### **[C] The Sirat:**

Though not mentioned in the Qur'an by name, the bridge over which all must pass to their final destiny is referred to in sura 19:71. As in the case of the Mi'raj, we must go to the Hadiths to find out what the Sirat really is. And when we do, we wonder from whence such an idea originated. We don't need to look far, for a similar bridge leading over the deep gulf of hell to Paradise is called Chinavad (the connecting link) in the Zoroastrian book Dinkart.

It is important to remember that none of the above extra-Biblical quotations are recognized by Biblical scholars, historians, or theologians as authentic events in the life of Christ, or in the scope of the Jewish faith. Consequently they are not included in the Bible. In fact their late dates (most are from the second century A.D.) should make it obvious to any casual observer that they have little authenticity whatsoever.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We have now come to the end of our discussion on the authority of the Qur'an. We began our study by noting that a possible reason for so much misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians could be the way we viewed our respective scriptures; and the real differences which exist concerning our views on revelation and inspiration. It seems obvious to me that until we understand these differences in perception we will be condemned to continue talking at and past each other, without any hope of coming together in true dialogue.

We noted in our study the tendency by Muslims to elevate their Qur'an to a higher degree than what we do with our own Bible. Examples of this elevation can be found in their demand that no-one write in its margins, or let it touch the floor. By doing so they could almost be blamed for deifying it, a practice which sparks of idolatry, the very sin (Shirk) which the Qur'an itself warns Muslims not to do (suras 4:48; 5:75-76; 41:6).

From there we dealt with the claim by Muslims that Qur'anic authority is found in the miracle of its composition; that it has superior and unique literary qualities which exceed any known written work. It seems to be the consensus of a number of scholars, however, that with no logical connection from one sura to the next, the Qur'an not only is difficult to read, its content is so confusing that it takes an enormous amount of patience to understand it. With criticisms like these it is difficult to understand why Muslims continue to elevate its supposed literary qualities.

We noted that Muslims claim the Qur'an a universal document. Yet, we found the Qur'an to be a uniquely 7th-9th century Arab piece of literature, which reflected the mentality and culture of that time. This was made clear with two examples: the case for the inferiority of women and the profoundly violent nature of the Qur'an and its prophet, Muhammad. From there we continued to the collection of the original documents, asking the question of whether any document which comes from the hands of God could be tampered with as we have witnessed here in these examples. The incredible respect and awe which is evidenced by Muslims today for their Qur'an belies the seemingly cavalier attitude of the earlier Caliphs towards the original codices, evidenced by their burning of all extent manuscripts, even those which Muhammad himself had deemed to be authoritative.

We were astonished at how an "eternal divine document of God" could contain within its text not only abrogations of itself, but errors which give doubt to its entire veracity. If God's word is to retain its integrity, it must remain above suspicion. Even the Qur'an demands such a standard. In sura 4:82 we read, "Do they not consider the Qur'an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancies" (sura 4:82). The testimony of the material we have covered here convicts the Qur'an of failing in the very claims it purports to uphold, and sustain. This bodes ill for its claim to inspiration, while negating any hope of any recognized authority.

In conclusion, while we can concede that the Qur'an is a fascinating book to study, it simply cannot maintain its status as the final Word of God it claims to be. The declaration of textual perfection by Muslims simply does not stand up to any critical analysis of its content. As we have seen, the Qur'an carries numerous inconsistencies with the former scriptures, while its narratives and stories help to discredit its claim to be the true Word of God. Popular sentiment and unquestioning fanatical devotion by Muslims are simply not adequate as a proof for the Qur'an's authenticity. When we take a sober analysis of the sources of the Qur'an, we find conclusive evidence that the confidence of the Muslims for their scripture is simply unfounded.

It stands to reason that those whose responsibility it was to compile a "holy book" which could compete with the existing scriptures, would naturally turn to the myths and legends of the surrounding civilizations and borrow many of their stories. Due to the predominance of oral tradition in the 7th-9th centuries one can understand how many of the stories became embellished and distorted over time. It is these corrupted stories that we find all through the Qur'an, many of which were adapted from 2nd century Talmudic literature, which was popular amongst the Jews of that area. Consequently it is the glaring similarities which we find between the Qur'an and these errant sources which nullifies the claim that the Qur'an could hope to be the true Word of God. The same test of verification is required of the Qur'an as that of all scriptures, including those which have preceded it (the Old and New Testament). For decades now scholars have attempted to find fault with our scriptures, applying to them the same critical investigation we have applied here and more, and for the most part we have welcomed it. Yet, through all the critical and sometimes polemical analysis which has been fomented against our scriptures, they have resolutely stood the test. It therefore comes as no surprise that the Bible continues to be the number one best-seller in the history of literature. Though we do not accord our scriptures the same sense of elevated worship which the Muslims demonstrate for their Qur'an, we do stand behind the veracity of our scriptures claim to divine inspiration. We do so because it has proven time and again to remain consistent to the claims it makes of itself and of all true revelations which come from the divine hand of God.

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