

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS TO ISLAM

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SEPTEMBER 11th AND THE MANDATE OF THE CHURCH

We have all been deeply impacted by the horror of the evil attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th. Our hearts were filled with grief and sadness as we saw the carnage caused by people intent on inflicting maximum destruction.

Like everybody else, we have been grappling with how to make sense of this tragedy. We long for justice and an uprooting of evil, but we are also painfully aware of how many of our innocent friends in the Iran Region could suffer and possibly lose their lives.

President Bush has said that '*Operation Enduring Freedom*' to fight terrorism will now be the main task of his administration. Tony Blair has made '*rooting out the cancer of terrorism*' the priority of his foreign policy. Other world leaders have said they will stand shoulder to shoulder with America in this fight.

But what should the response of the Church be? How should the events of 11 September 2001 challenge the Church of Jesus Christ?

As Christians involved in missions to Muslims, we believe the Church needs to have a clear response to the tragedy. Just as politicians are rising up to the challenge of rooting out terrorism and protecting democracy, so too the Church should rise up to love Muslims by preaching Christ to them and campaigning for their religious freedom.

Make no mistake, how Christians respond at this time will decide the future and nature of mission to the Muslim world in our generation.

Love Muslims By Preaching Christ

As the world watches the political events unfold in all their complexity, the Church must not forget that the ultimate answer to evil in all societies is Christ. As it is rightly the task of politicians to lead their nations in responding to the atrocity, so it is our responsibility to preach Christ.

However because of fear, unbelief and a lack of love, the Church has rarely preached Christ to Muslims, as it should have done. Instead Christians have largely either ignored or appeased the Muslim world.

After the September 11th attack it is surely time for a massive shift in mission thinking. Christ-centred preaching to Muslims must come to the top of the Church's agenda.

Campaign for Religious Freedom in Muslim Countries

In the aftermath of the attack it is right to be concerned that Muslims in Western countries are not attacked.

But it is also right for Christians to be reminded that there is no freedom to preach Christ to Muslims, right across the Islamic world. Stretching from West Africa to the Far East there are over one billion Muslims living in 34 countries.

In the vast majority of these countries – ***there is no religious freedom.***

There is no freedom to proclaim Christ, no freedom for Muslims to convert, no freedom for Christians from a Muslim background to assemble together or be trained for ministry. In many Muslim countries there is no freedom to even print Bibles or build churches.

And in all Muslim countries the law of apostasy, that demands death for anyone converting from Islam, is either tolerated or actively sponsored.

Over one billion people are not allowed to hear the Gospel. This is the greatest violation of human rights in our time – yet there is little passion to see things change.

Twenty years ago thousands of Christians campaigned for religious freedom in the former Communist countries. It was considered an outrage that they could not hear the Gospel. But when it comes to the Muslim world it seems as if our attitude is different and most Christians accept the status quo.

As politicians commit themselves to '*Operation Enduring Freedom*', surely it is time for the Church to campaign for true religious freedom in Muslim countries.

In the coming months it is clear there are going to be dramatic diplomatic changes. The call to the church is to seize this historic opportunity and campaign for religious freedom in Muslim countries. This means that religious freedom must have priority in all the diplomacy that elected officials conduct with Muslims countries.

Let politicians urge Muslim leaders who denounce the attack on the USA to commit themselves to religious freedom, so Christians can preach Christ in the streets of Tehran and Riyadh, just as Muslims can preach Islam in the streets of London and New York.

In Closing

We were deeply impressed by the bravery and commitment of the rescue services in response to the tragedy. While others were escaping to safety, they ran to the danger zone to save lives.

Our prayer is that the church will be obedient to her mandate, and do all she can to boldly proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour to the Muslim world.

For Information about Islam and communicating the gospel to Muslims, see www.answering-islam.org

DARE WE CONFRONT?!
(A CALL FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN MUSLIM EVANGELISM)

by: Jay Smith

It was not a day unlike any other at Speaker's Corner, in Hyde Park. I had been up speaking on my ladder concerning the prophet Muhammad for about fifteen minutes, when suddenly an irate Muslim, also named Muhammad, standing directly in front of my ladder, began to shake it while yelling profanities, until I was thrown off. I got back on and continued my talk, when Muhammad once again repeated his yelling, and grabbing the ladder threw me off once again. It was time for the police to intervene, which they did, enabling me to finish my speech to the crowd gathered.

Upon descending from my ladder I was approached by Muhammad, still seething with anger, yelling at me to please stop casting aspersions on his prophet. It was at this point that an Irish atheist, a fellow who often sided with the Muslims, came up to us and asked why we bothered to talk to each other since he had witnessed Muhammad's rather violent reaction to my speech a few minutes earlier.

Without any hesitation, Muhammad put his arm around my shoulder, turned to face the Irishman, and in his thick Arab accent responded: 'Mr. Smith believes in God...I believe in God...you don't. Mr. Smith believes in the prophets...I believe in the prophets...you don't. Mr. Smith believes in paradise...I believe in paradise...you don't. Mr. Smith is my brother, and you are not, so leave us alone!'

I have thought often of that incident, and wondered whether that scenario represented something we in the West have missed in our exchanges with Islam. Here was a Muslim, who, though angered to the point of violence at my talk, could yet put his arm around me and defend our relationship to someone else who, though he had always been polite, had never bothered to confront a Muslim head-on. Why was I Muhammad's brother and not the polite Irishman? Could it be that my confrontational approach had a greater impact on my eastern friend than the more irenical overtures preferred by missionaries in the West today? Or was this merely an aberration, the response of one man, at a particular place and time, which would possibly never be repeated? The answer, of course is never either/or, so why not both/and?

CRITIQUING CONFRONTATION

In the UK there is a broad consensus which believes it is wrong and perhaps dangerous to confront people of other faiths, particularly those who are from Islam. Getting up on a ladder and challenging groups of Muslims openly at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, or taking on invitations to oppose Muslim apologists in highly publicised debates on the authority of the Qur'an, some say, is not only much too aggressive but detrimental to the gospel, since it does not honour God or call people to faith in Jesus Christ. The fear is that rather than engender substantive communication these confrontational methods merely set one side against the other, with each trying to publicly humiliate the other, which leads to building even higher the walls of difference already existing between the two communities. A more profitable avenue, it is said, is that of dialogue, defined by some as 'an exercise where two opposing parties come together and discuss their differences in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding'.

Most people, I am sure, would agree with this premise, as confrontation between faiths is admittedly controversial, and not entirely immune from error. How then should we answer the above accusations?

DEFINING DIALOGUE

It might be helpful to begin by redefining the concept 'dialogue'. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul used the word 'dialogue' a number of times, and exemplified it in his own methodology. He first went to the Jews, entering the Synagogues, where he participated in '*Dialegomai*', which when translated means 'to think different things, ponder, and then dispute' (taken from Peter May's Dialogue in Evangelism, Grove Books Ltd., Bramcote, Nottingham, 1990). Paul's premise for dialoguing, therefore, was not as many liberal Christians seek to do, an exercise whereby one learns from others in order to 'meet Christ in the other person', or where we 'learn from others in order to attain a fuller grasp of truth' (John Hick's Truth and Dialogue). Paul used dialogue as a two-way flow of ideas. Acts 17:2-3, 17-18 shows us that he sought to prove what he said, marshalling arguments to support his case, providing

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evidence, and thereby engaging in argument, due to his convinced preaching (Goldsmith's Islam & Christian Witness, pg.120).

By argument, we do not suggest belligerent, rude or intrusive behaviour. Arguments can and do occur whenever there is a difference of opinion. Aggressive behaviour, however, tends to commence when one of the parties runs out of good ideas. It is natural that when our arguments are weak, we become more belligerent. Let us, therefore, make sure our arguments are never weak. Paul never needed that as an excuse, saying: 'What I am saying is true and reasonable' (Acts 26:25). We should be able to say the same.

Paul's intent was 'not that his hearers were converted, but that they were persuaded' (Acts 17:4). Paul's job was to persuade them of the truth of the gospel. What those who heard did with that truth was then their own responsibility.

COMMON CRITICISMS

What then should we say concerning our encounter with Islam today in the UK? Do we use this definition of dialogue in our work? Is our primary objective to defend the gospel, and to preach Christ crucified, while standing firm against those who choose to castigate these very beliefs? Most of us would choose to answer in the affirmative, while others would be more cautious.

1. Should we Humiliate?

Certain people will suggest that confronting Muslims may lead inadvertently to humiliation; to which we would concur. Yet, does not truth often humiliate? The perception that Muslims suffer from humiliation in the modern world has little to do, I believe, with our tactics, but everything to do with the nature of the material we are taking to them; and that, certainly must be legitimate. If what we say is true, then it does not dishonour God when we use it, even though it may humiliate the people to whom it is directed.

Let us take Christ as an example. Did he publicly humiliate his adversaries and discredit elements of their faith? Certainly he did. Observe Matthew 23:13-33, where he calls the Pharisees 'hypocrites, blind guides, snakes and a brood of vipers!' Would we not say that he also humiliated the money changers in Luke 19:45? Yes indeed, for we can read in verse 47 that it was because of these actions that the leaders of the Jews sought to kill him. Why then do we castigate those who do likewise today?

2. Is not a loving witness enough?

There are many who believe that the only credible way to do evangelism is by 'the loving witness to Christ [in us]...and by showing how that witness 'changes everything'. Indeed, few would argue that we are to witness to Christ in us, but is that all we are to do? The Muslim will respond by claiming that it is a corrupt witness, authenticated by an even more corrupted scripture.

How then will we answer? They will tell us that the proof for their contention can be found in the witness of 'Christians' in the West compared with those in Islam. It may come as a surprise, but one of the principle causes of conversion to Islam in the US is through the witness of other Muslims (considered the sixth most common reason for conversion in a list of twelve). In fact, the vast majority of those who have converted have come from Christian circles. You will find that there are many decent Muslims who also use 'friendship evangelism' far more effectively than we.

It is requisite upon us that we in the UK take this question seriously. Yet, I would strongly disagree with those who contend that the Muslim world has seen far too little of a loving witness among Christians in the West. Providing they have the correct definition of a Christian (versus simply anyone living in the West), I would contend that is all they see and know. Ask Muslims what their impression is of Bible-believing Christians and you will find few who would criticize us for the way we act. Their problem is not with our behaviour but that we have no divine authority for our actions since the foundation for our beliefs, our scriptures, has not only been corrupted, but has been invalidated by the subsequent truth of Islam, found in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the prophet. That is the bad news.

The good news is that historiography should matter to Muslims. And there are enough historical data about the

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history of the Jews, and the life of a man called Jesus who was one of them which stand up to what we believe from the Bible and which show that historically the Bible is reliable. Yet, unless we go to Muslims and communicate this, our witness will have little effect. Muslims revere a historical figure called Muhammad; likewise they must respond to the Bible in a historiographic way. We must answer for our faith in a way that speaks to them.

What is more we have further confirmation to dispute the second part of their contention: 'that the Qur'an invalidates the revelation which preceded it since it is the purest and final revelation from God.' The new historical evidence being researched at the moment in England and Germany points to many impurities in the Qur'an, and brings into question whether the Qur'an was written or even existed in Muhammad's century. News like this needs to be communicated. In fact, it would seem unloving not to do so.

This brings up the problem concerning how we define a loving witness as exemplified by Christ and the apostles. I love my sons, yet I discipline them when they step out of line. To do otherwise would not be loving. We correct our best friends and loved ones when we feel they are incorrect. To do otherwise would not be friendly. Why then do we not consider it acceptable to act the same with our Muslim friends, particularly when we know that to keep quiet will have repercussions not only for this life, but for eternity? To remain silent flies in the face of a true example of love; for who would not use any means at their disposal to stop a loved one from walking into an abyss?

Had we asked my friend Muhammad whether it was loving to attempt to throw me off my ladder on that Sunday afternoon, his response I'm sure would be that to do otherwise would be less than loving, sharing a definition of love analogous to mine above.

3. What about Propositional Truth?

We can also spend all our time making friends with our Muslim neighbours. Many missionaries make a career out of it. Yet I am tired of Christians who believe that the gospel is nothing more than a series of web-relationships where we seek to 'love' our Muslim friends into the Kingdom.

The battle is much greater than simply out-performing our neighbours in kindness. The battle has to do with propositional truth, with whether God the Creator has communicated his revelation to his creation, and whether we, his creation can know and recognize what he has communicated from what is counterfeit.

If we believe and are convinced that what we say is true, then certainly we should be prepared not only to define it adequately but defend it passionately. Otherwise it is a truth not worthy of our time and energy, and certainly not worthy of our life's calling.

4. Cannot a Good Argument be Supplanted?

There are those who say: 'A person who is won by an argument is at the mercy of a better argument.' Yes, that is true, yet a similar claim can be made for the alternative, for, 'A person who is won by an experience is at the mercy of a better experience, or a person who is won by charity is always at the mercy of even better charity'. Is this not how many cults function and grow?

The danger of looking for experience to validate one's faith (or being dependant upon signs and wonders), is that a vacuum is created in the area of persuasion. How do we know the evangelist or healer is speaking the truth? Miracles are then required to give him/her validity (the deeds become the argument), and one gets quickly disillusioned if the deeds fail to match the promises.

I do not believe that argumentation, in itself is the problem, but rather the focus of our argument which may be at fault. Most evangelism training today is centred on how to communicate the need for salvation from sin, yet the secular world is not asking that question. Before they entertain the notion of sin they want to know whether Christianity is true, whether it can be held up to objective verification. This is the question we need to involve ourselves in as Christians in the twentieth century; to prove that our faith does not rest solely on our own personal experience, but that it can be found to be credible using criteria the sceptics can understand.

These questions of methodology are not exactly new, nor are they different from that which we find witnessed in the

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first century church. Therefore they should not be unfamiliar to us, as it is well represented in the proactive and confrontational model which I find Jesus, the disciples and even Paul exploiting almost 2,000 years ago. Let's then look at the paradigm the first century Christians employed to see if it can indeed also be emulated in the UK in the twentieth century (again my thanks to Peter May's Dialogue in Evangelism).

THE EARLY CHURCH'S METHODOLOGY

Defence, or *Apologia* against an accuser should not come as a surprise as it is mentioned five times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; Acts 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; and 2 Timothy 4:16). Twice we are asked to defend the gospel (Philippians 1:7,16; and 1 Peter 3:15). Thus a strong defence of our beliefs is not foreign to New Testament teaching at all.

Jesus was a Jew from the Mediterranean world, an environment similar to those who birthed Islam. When approached by those who came to listen and to learn, he treated them in kind, listening courteously and engaging them in friendly dialogue. Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to Jesus at night (John 3) is a fine example of such an approach. We too are asked to follow the example of our Lord, and respond to the Nicodemuses of our world, answering their questions and teaching them the truths of the gospel with gentleness and respect.

Yet, when approached by those whose sole purpose was to confront and attack, Jesus treated them in kind. Thus, he was highly confrontational with the Pharisees who came to challenge him, calling them 'hypocrites', 'blind fools', 'whitewashed tombs', as well as 'snakes' and 'vipers' (Matthew 23:13-33). He was equally confrontational with the money-changers at the temple (Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45), not seeking at all to 'discuss their positions in an atmosphere of mutual understanding', but storming in and overturning their tables. While we do not have the authority of Jesus, and therefore would be ill-advised literally to 'overturn the tables' of those who stand against his church, his example and resolve are nonetheless a model for us as we seek resolutely to confront the 'Pharisees' of our day who likewise aim to pervert the Kingdom of God in our time.

Paul, moreover was multi-faceted in his methodology. At times he contextualized his message; as when he met the diaspora Jews and read the scriptures with them on their territory (Acts 13:13-15); or as when he borrowed a philosophical idea while applying a Biblical intent in the Areopagus of Athens (Acts 17:22-31).

Yet he was not averse to confrontation, and was remarkably proactive in his apologetics, venturing into the synagogues and the market places to reason with some, speaking boldly, or refuting, debating, and arguing with others (Acts 13:46; 17:17; 19:8-9; 18:28; 2 Cor: 5:11; 10:5).

Yet through it all he unremittently preached the gospel (Romans 1:16; 15:20; 1 Corinthians 1:23). Uppermost in his mind was the need to persuade people of the truth of Christ's gospel, for as he himself wrote, he sought to, 'demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5). As a consequence, he obtained results using both methods (Acts 13:32; 17:4; 11:34; 17:32; 18:6).

Paul's resolute and non-compromising stance can be traced throughout his ministry in the book of Acts. There were times when he went outside his Jewish community to the Greeks in their territory, reasoning with them from within their traditions (Acts 17:1-2, 17). In the city of Ephesus, a pagan city, he began by first 'arguing persuasively' at the synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8), and when forced to leave them he refused to acquiesce but went to the lecture hall of *Tyrannus*, a secular institution, where he continued his discussions for two more years, with both Jews and Greeks! (Acts 19:9-10). Similarly in Rome, from morning till evening, for two years in his rented apartment, he boldly 'tried to convince' those who came to talk to him about Jesus (Acts 28:23-31).

Moreover, he didn't come with simple religious platitudes, but learned to speak to the people in their own idiom. For instance, while in Athens he sought to learn about the Greek's beliefs, studying the objects of their worship (Acts 17:22-23). He knew their philosophies (both *Epicureans* [remote God] and *Stoics* [Pantheistic]), and even quoted their writers [*Epimenides* of Crete and the poet *Aratus*] (v.28). It was after first understanding them on their level that he then demonstrated the inadequacy of their ideas (v.29).

Some criticize that Paul's method in Athens was unsuccessful, and so he chose a more spiritual strategy in Corinth.

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Yet we find that some of the gentiles to whom he spoke in Athens were converted; the two listed by Luke are Dionysius (a member of the *Areopagus*, and possibly the same Dionysius whom Eusebius later records as the first bishop of Athens), and the woman named Damaris (Acts 17:34).

The examples above often involved Paul ministering to people who were gentiles, and therefore outside the Jewish community. This stands against a popular criticism that the early church only challenged those within their own community, and therefore we likewise must not challenge others who are not of our kind (i.e. Muslims today).

Paul was not alone, for Jesus also involved himself in dialogue with outsiders. Take the examples of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16); or his confrontation with the Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 12:13); or his dispute with his Pharisee host at a dinner party (Luke 7:36-50); or his more convivial contact with Nicodemus (John 3); and the Samaritan woman (John 4).

Other apostles also went outside their community and used 'dialogue' with those from outside Christian circles. When confronted by members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, the Jews of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia, Steven did not seek to return to his own but held his ground and returned their arguments; so much so that 'they could not stand up against his wisdom' (Acts 6:9-10), and finally decided to execute him (Acts 7:57-8:1). Philip was equally comfortable in dialogue with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40).

Why then do we consider this proactive and resolute form of evangelism, often aimed at people outside of the Christian community, detrimental to the gospel when it was the model used so often by the very people who gave us the gospel?

There are those who would answer that applying such a model today would not only create walls which become insurmountable but would deter us from being humane. It is this position which I have grown up with all my life. Yet, having spent my formative years in India, I would now argue that the walls which may exist, do so not necessarily because we haven't been kind enough, but rather perhaps because we have been too kind. We have sought to communicate the gospel not for the benefit of our hearers, but for those who send us out to do the work, those in the churches who support our ministries, those of our own kind, who ask that we use strategies suitable to our own environment, and with which we are familiar. Had we taken the time to study how the Muslims communicate, or what methods they used we might have found not surprisingly that they stand in contrast to those of our own, and surprisingly similar to those exemplified in the first century church. Let me explain.

THE MUSLIM'S METHODOLOGY

I was born and grew up in India, and had Muslim room-mates as well as class-mates. Since then I have been to numerous Muslim student meetings on campuses here in the UK, and have attended Friday sermons at many mosques in India, France, Senegal, the US and England. The over-arching impression I get from all these contacts is that the method used by Muslims the world over to communicate their beliefs is substantially different from that which we choose to employ in our more European, or North American-Western context. It is rare that I find a Muslim who is not ready actively and vociferously to defend the faith of his family and kin. When it comes to aggressive, or passionate evangelism, they put us to shame. It is no wonder then that when we fail to do the same they assume that we have little to say, and even less to convey, which is unfortunate.

Hence, I sense it is time that we reassess to whom it is exactly we are trying to communicate the gospel, and why it is that we have proven so ineffectual. What I fear we will discover is that a primary reason our methodology with Muslims is so woefully lacking is that it fails to appreciate the context of the people to whom it is addressed. For, in fact, it is they and not ourselves who exercise the more confrontational and polemical agenda in their witness to the world which we find so well represented in the book of Acts.

Peruse the literature on their book tables. Attend the Muslim meetings on campus and listen to their speakers. Examine the Muslim web-pages on the Internet (over 200 Muslim web-sites have been found which challenge Christianity, while we have a mere 7 which attempt to counter their challenge). They do not at all seek a 'dialogue' (as defined by current missiological thinking). In fact I would be surprised if they had ever countenanced doing so using the parameters we currently adhere to, as it ill reflects their own cultural forms for communicating ideas. Instead, they have chosen a contrasting tack from that of our own; one which better reflects who they are.

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And who exactly are they? Take a look and you will find that the majority are not from the Middle East but from Asia; more specifically from the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh), which, along with Indonesia now constitutes over half the Muslim World (between 500-600 million out of the current 1.2 billion worldwide population). They, not we, have taken on the polemical agenda, because it fits their own historical environment, as minorities amongst a much greater Hindu majority (in the case of the Indian subcontinent), or within an encroaching Western, and therefore perceived Christian majority in the capacious secular world.

From this background they have prescribed the following three agendas: 1) That the West is in decline (morally, socially, economically, spiritually), 2) that Christianity is at fault, because of a corrupted scripture, and 3) that Islam must and will replace it, as the final and more complete revelation.

What then have we done to meet this new challenge? Some of us persist in the same approaches popular since the last century; befriending our Muslim neighbours, seeking to dialogue with them, yet letting them set the agenda, which invariably degenerates in maligning our beliefs and practices. That's not to say that this approach is necessarily wrong, as there is a need to redefine and defend that which they do not understand. What has become increasingly manifest to me, however, is that many of our Western Muslims are patently aware of our beliefs, and seek out these dialogues not with the hope of gaining 'mutual understanding', but as a public platform from which to confront us unreservedly with the weakness of our arguments, seeking cleverly to attack the very foundations of our faith. The writings of the most prolific current Dai'ists: Ahmed Deedat, Khuram Murad, Dr. Jamal Badawi and Shabir Ally should leave us in no doubt as to their true agenda.

For that reason I feel it is time that we choose a different tack, one which does not merely set out to answer their increasingly monotonous 'shopping list' of accusations and challenges, but a strategy which advances beyond such polemics, and seeks to reply to these provocations with challenges of our own. If that is to be done, we need to first assess from where our current methodology was derived, by asking who exactly are they that are responsible for creating much of our missiology today.

THE OLD PARADIGM

In the seminaries where I have studied (five to date), I have been taught by individuals who organized their missiology while on the field as missionaries, within the hostile environment of the Muslim world. It is common knowledge that in the Islamic world one is not permitted to criticize the Qur'an or the prophet, otherwise one might find himself on the next available plane home. These missionaries, however, upon returning home sought to impose those same missiological principles and strategies formed in an hostile environment on their home countries, so that their principles have now permeated the missiological teaching in our seminaries and churches today, influencing us all.

Yet, Britain and the US are not hostile environments. There is no longer any need to protect ourselves or our ministry from civil or religious authorities. The criteria required for communicating the gospel in the Muslim world is no longer relevant for the more receptive Western environment. The missionaries, in their haste to contextualize the gospel to a hostile context, failed to reason that a similar exercise at contextualization was required once they returned to their point of origin. Yet they failed in this very simple task; to the detriment of us all, demanding that we refrain from any public critique of the Qur'an and the prophet.

Furthermore, the very deterrents which they place upon us (to refrain from criticism or confrontation) are certainly not practised by our Muslim friends. It is rare that a Muslim in dialogue with a Christian fails to remind us that our Bible is not only corrupt but that our Lord is nothing more than a man. We do not castigate him for speaking his mind, because we live in an environment where freedom of speech is cherished. Then why do we choose to censure ourselves? Is this not a double standard? The very freedoms we allow our Muslim friends, we refuse ourselves. Consequently we seek to fight the battle with 'one hand tied behind our backs'. I therefore believe that we need to rethink our missiology which will in turn change our methodology, so as to reflect the actual environment in which we find ourselves.

A NEW PARADIGM

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We have already noticed that those who gave us the gospel sought to engage actively with the leaders and thinkers from their surrounding world. We are called to do likewise in the environment in which we find ourselves, be it London, the US or wherever the Lord chooses to put us. I would venture to say that the atmosphere has changed little since the first century, and has perhaps become increasingly vociferous since then.

Muslims (especially university students) in London have been on the offensive, attacking us aggressively on all fronts, denouncing our scriptures, our belief in Christ, and ridiculing our history as well as our current witness. I have found numerous Muslims who believe that Christianity simply has no credibility, and will soon be replaced by Islam 'the true and final revelation', within our generation. It is this message they are preaching to good effect, so much so that, according to their own statistics (if we dare trust them), over 20,000 mostly English women have now converted to Islam in the past ten years, with that number growing daily.

What has been our response to stop this newly aggressive evangelistic stance taken by Islam? Certainly here in Britain there are few Christians who are standing up to defend themselves against these attacks. Whether it is through fear, ignorance, a misguided missiological position, or simple lethargy, the church has refused to defend what it believes, and I find my job an increasingly isolated and lonely affair (2 Timothy 4:16-18). This, I feel is sad and debilitating, because I strongly believe it gives the Muslims the wrong message.

Too often we fail to ask ourselves what the Muslims are hearing from us. When we fail to stand up for the authority of our scriptures, when we refrain from speaking about the Lordship or divine nature of Jesus Christ, or are reticent in defending, let alone defining, the Trinity, and when we continually apologize for what we believe to be true, the message the Muslims hear is that we not only misunderstand our beliefs, but are unsure whether they are true. How can we convince them of the truth of the gospel when we look and talk as if we are doubtful ourselves?

Take the example of the Muslim *Imam*, *Maulvi Sahib*, *Pir*, or religious leader in the Muslim communities. He is forthright, dynamic, stalwart and triumphant in his conviction that the Qur'an is the final word of God, and that Islam is the faith for today. Those who listen to him are convicted as much by his presentation as by what he says. This has been brought home to us as we watch our television screens and wonder at the mass hysteria evidenced at many of the Friday rallies across the Muslim world. The closest parallel we have are our evangelistic meetings. Yet, the very vehicle which works so well for those coming to Christ in our own communities, is the vehicle we refuse to use with Muslims for fear of hurting their sensibilities. Consequently, in our attempt to be 'Christ-like' we merely come across as evasive, docile, subdued, timid.

We think we are communicating the gospel as Christ had intended, yet we fail to look at his example, an example which the Muslims better emulate than do we ourselves. Meanwhile the Muslims raise up leaders within their own community who look at the model of dialogue not as an exercise for mutual understanding but as an excuse to score points. Jurgen Moltman has written two very trenchant pages on this imbalance in the dialogue process:

'... minorities are always very interested in public dialogue, but majorities are not. Representatives of Islam have no interest in dialogues with Coptic Christians in Egypt, or with Christian minorities in Iran or Turkey, Iraq or Syria; but in the Christian countries of Europe they gladly finance Muslim-Christian dialogues as a way of presenting themselves. I experienced this myself in Turin and Naples. When I suggested that the next Christian-Muslim dialogue should be held just as publicly in Cairo or Riad, the Muslims quite coolly waved the proposal aside. In Christian countries which are now multi-faith, they demand tolerance for Islam, a tolerance which they notoriously deny to Christians, Jews and Hindus in their own 'house of Islam' (God for a Secular Society London: SCM 1999)

Have any of us wondered why so few Muslims convert to Christianity, when we know that we have the truth? Why is it that we are so convinced of the gospel, yet the majority of Muslims with whom we speak walk away believing our message inadequate? Could it be our presentation is flawed?

Furthermore, is it not curious that those who do come through are not the opinion-makers or leaders within their community, but are often the marginalized and disenfranchised, most of whom saw a vision or a dream, a factor which has little to do with our involvement, and even less to do with objective and verifiable truth? Is it any wonder

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then that they are so fearful of returning to their own kind to share what they have learned? Certainly, one can blame the small numbers on social factors, as we always do. But could it not be that our paradigm is inadequate? Could it be that we need to get away from our own ethno-centric European and American way of communicating the Gospel, which reflects more our own sensibilities, and take a look at how they do it? I think we must.

Let's be honest. The struggle is engaged, and for too long we have been losing it. Yet, meanwhile we have been given one of the principle keys for unlocking the cage of Islam; historically verifiable evidence for the human and piecemeal origins of a very un-divine Qur'an, unearthed ironically by the very people who a century ago sought to do the same with our own scriptures; the liberal scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is this evidence which now not only authenticates the historical references in our scriptures but eradicates the authority for the Qur'an. This work by scholars as renowned as Gerd-Rüdiger Puin of Tübingen will bring about a disillusionment within Islam in the West, as it strikes at the very foundation of all they believe. We welcome criticism of our scriptures, which is proper, as it keeps open the door for a real exchange of ideas and dialogue. Yet, we persecute those who seek reciprocity with the Qur'an.

Gunther Lüling is one case in point. A German theologian and philologist, his doctoral thesis on the 'sources' of the Qur'an - still not translated into English - was initially declared 'eximium opus' by Erlangen University in Germany in 1970, a rare accolade attached only to outstanding theses. Yet he was subsequently ostracised by the academy, refused a chair - and never worked again. The work is controversial. In it he claims that much of the Muslim Qur'an is based on a pre-Islamic collection of non-Trinitarian Christian liturgical prayers or and strophic songs - a Christian 'Qur'an' in fact (Qur'an means 'something to perform' = hymnody), extant pre-Muhammad, and that it was subsequently reworked and augmented by editors to eliminate evidence of its Christian origins - and of Muhammad's actual intention of founding a religion that returned to the pagan, Abrahamic fertility cult of the high places. The work is finally being published in America by Prometheus next year.

Not only is this a double standard, but eventually it will bring about the very atmosphere of distrust, censure, and suspicion evidenced in Muslim countries today which we abhor and publically stand against. This I feel is hypocritical.

Meanwhile the Muslims in our midst are carrying the battle to us, and ironically perhaps forcing us to reassess exactly what it is we believe, and why. In many ways we can thank them for that, because it snaps us out of our lethargy and complacency, and forces us to 'knuckle down' and reassess not only the reasons for our beliefs, but how we can best communicate them back to them. The questions they are asking are good ones, as they are foundational to our faith. Yet we hear few sermons in our churches today which focus on issues pertaining to the trinity or the authority of our scriptures. Consequently the church has raised up a generation of students who are ill-equipped to define their faith, and even less equipped to defend it in public. Is it no wonder they are crying out for help?

What then has been our response? Unfortunately, the British church spends its energies repeating a plethora of worn-out excuses about why we must not hurt the sensibilities of our Muslims friends, while keen young men and women who take the challenge of Islam on the campuses seriously, are ill-equipped with few rebuttals and even fewer models to emulate. Church officials who claim to be the leaders of the Christian/Muslim debate should take that responsibility seriously, refrain from their posturing, and lead by example.

Instead of running from a healthy exchange with our Muslim friends, let us take on their challenges and find the answers. Then let us go to those who dispute with us and respond to their claims resolutely. But let us do it with a conviction born out of honest debate. This will help to strengthen the church, as it forces us all to return to our apologetics and find out the answers which we know already exist; so that we, like Peter before us will be 'prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have' (1 Peter 3:15). Inevitably our convictions will engender a response in kind, particularly where it involves refuting that which Islam believes.

We will all meet our Muhammads, who to our face may hurl their objections yet by our side will call us brother. Yet we must be prepared not only to defend our faith against their attacks forthrightly, and dynamically but reciprocate in kind. To do otherwise is simply dishonest. Those who have gone before us were prepared to die for what they believed. History tells us that all of the disciples bar one gave their lives for the gospel they defended. Are we likewise prepared? I think it is only right that we take the challenge set before us and follow

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their example. Then maybe we will see not just ones and twos coming to the Lord, but entire families, communities and nations. That is my prayer.

THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY

(GENESIS 3:8-9)

Introduction:

Some time ago, I had just arrived home from the university, where I had been involved in an enlivening though exhausting discussion with an English convert to Islam. We had talked about the role of the *Khilafa*, and how Britain was or was not ripe for an Islamic state. Because of my Mennonite background, I had difficulty not only in agreeing with my friend, but in understanding why such a state was necessarily important for him. I couldn't understand his position and he couldn't understand mine. Both of us were simply talking past each other.

It was cold that evening, and feeling grubby and tired, I ran a hot bath and sank down into the warm soothing water until the suds were tickling my nose. I watched the vapours lift lazily off the surface and disappear into the dark cold air above. It is at times like these that my mind gets free, and thinking flows. On this night, I was still pre-occupied with my earlier conversation, when suddenly, an idea popped right into my partly submerged head which would have clarified what I was trying to say to my friend at SOAS, and unblock the log-jam which we had experienced. The idea, interestingly, originated from two seemingly insignificant verses which are found in the third chapter of Genesis.

If you have the time, put this paper down and read Genesis chapter 3, and ask yourself what is the major theme of this chapter? How would you interpret it for someone else? In other words, what is the hermeneutical key which comes to mind here?

Now, without wanting to lose my audience in the first few minutes, let me explain what I mean by "hermeneutical key." This term is nothing more than the science of interpreting what scripture says, exegeting passages so they make sense, or presenting an idea which is used as a cornerstone for other ideas, a sort of code-book which explains a host of little known secrets, a program which unravels the intricate details of a complicated set of beliefs. In fact, by penning these definitions we have carried out an exercise in doing just that.

Where would the two small verses which I am referring to be? Look at verses 8 & 9.

(Genesis 3:8-9):

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called out to the man. "Where are you?"

"...God walked in the garden, with Adam...and the Lord had to call out to Adam." That was it! That was what I had been missing! That was what my friend needed to hear. I needed to take him back to Eden. Now it all made sense.

[A] FINDING THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY

1) THE GARDEN OF EDEN:

Let me explain. Ever since I was a little child I had been told the story of creation, and the story of the Garden of Eden. I knew all about Adam and Eve. I still remember vividly till this day the movie titled "The Bible." I remember the Eden episode especially, as it has become the standard for how I view that story even up to this day. The greater part of the story, however, gravitated around the incident at the tree with the forbidden fruit.

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I soon found that most of the stories about Adam and Eve dealt with the fruit. Every Sunday-School lesson, every night-time devotional on the subject, and every film and film-strip always reminded me that it was here that I and all of the rest of the little boys and girls in the world became evil. We all became polluted because of that offensive fruit. Every teacher since that day has taken it upon themselves to remind me and every other little boy and girl that Eden was where all our troubles began. I am sure that the reason I don't like fruit till this day has something to do with my sensibilities over that dastardly first-fruit which has put us into the mess in which we find ourselves.

But, you know what is curious? I don't ever remember anyone talking about **verses 8 and 9!** And I don't know why, all of a sudden, those two verses popped into my head on that cold spring evening while basking in my 2nd floor tub. But they did. And since then, they have completely changed the way I view God, and the way I intend to introduce Him to others, especially my Muslim friends.

Now some of you may say, "So what? They are not important to the story, except to tell us that Adam and Eve were about to be caught for their sin." And on face value, I would have to agree, "So what?" All my life I have been taught the same view. But it wasn't just they who were going to be caught, but me and my sisters and all the rest of the little boys and girls who were in the world. We were all 'imputed' with guilt as a result of that act. Genesis 3 has always been drummed into my head as the chapter on the great fall. I had never really stopped at these two verses, or paid them any attention, because the real meat was with the apple and with the condemnation which followed. That is, until that night in the tub.

While salubriously sitting, soaking in the suds a suggestion slunk its way slowly into my subconscious, saying: "**what was God doing walking among the trees and calling out to Adam, 'Where are you?'**"

Here was the creator of the universe, who flung the stars into space and tread out the valleys on the earth, who reached out and in one swoop separated the light from the darkness; who shaped the mountains and rustled up the wind, and with only a word formed every living, swimming, crawling or flying creature that has ever existed. This great omnipotent and powerful God humbled Himself to walk in the cool of the day, and look among the trees and call out, "Where are you?" This was the God who made the heavens and the earth. Why should He have to call out and ask Adam where he was?

Now can you begin to see why I find these two verses so important? Here in this little scenario, we find something about the character of God which you will not find in any other religious or philosophical book in the history of the world. No other religion or faith even comes close to delineating the creator-God as someone who would lower himself and come among those whom He has created.

The Aristotelian tradition of thought starts from a completely different starting point. The material world and God, according to Aristotle, are incompatible with one another. The two never intersect. The one, God, exists in total separation from the other, the material world. This view of the God-world dichotomy, which originated in the third century B.C., has become deeply entrenched in not just western-European thinking but has been borrowed, via the expansion and conquest of North Africa, by Islam following the prophet's death.

Therefore, since no other faith has desired to present their God in the context of relationship, they have missed what I consider to be the most important aspect about God, which, in turn explains the entire scope of who we are, how the world is to be run, and what God's intentions are for His created.

From these two verses we can find three things.

1) **(Limitation)** We read that this **omnipotent** God came down and was walking in the garden. That shows us, as I have mentioned, that God lowered Himself and took on the limitations of His created. He was looking for Adam. Therefore, He restricted Himself, casting away His omnipotence to walk and search and talk in the same fashion as did His created man and woman.

2) **(Response)** This **omniscient**, all-knowing God called out "Where are you?" Certainly God

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knew where Adam was. He knows everything. Yet, in this verse we find that He gave Adam the chance to respond. He had humbled Himself to come down to His level, and now He was calling out to Adam to return to Him.

3) **(Relationship)** Finally, and most importantly, from the fact that God was walking about and looking, we can surmise that this was something that He did often with Adam and Eve, possibly taking walks with them in the evening. What astounds me about this act, however, is that the all-powerful creator God seemed to have a personal **relationship** with Adam and Eve. The possibility that He did this often shows me that He cared about them, and sought out their companionship. He was looking for them, which implies that He wanted to spend time with them. Indeed, He was in relationship with them. In other words, here we find an infinite creator-God who walks and talks with His finite created man. Do you know of any other concept or belief in a God who claims to walk and talk in the context of a loving relationship?

The reason I find this important is that from this item alone, I believe, we can build a theology of not only who God is, but who we are, what purpose we have here on earth, how we are to model our lives, our families, our societies, where it is that we are headed, and what we will find once we get there.

It is these verses that show us the unique relationship which Adam and Eve shared with their creator. Therefore, it is this relationship which, I feel, must be the hermeneutical key with which we can measure almost everything else.

Interestingly, in respect to Islam, it is not surprising to note that these two verses do not exist at all in the Qur'an. A reason for their exclusion could be due to the influence of the Aristotelian thought which, some believe, crept into Islamic philosophy after the conquest of North Africa, where it had already been well entrenched.

(**note**=the evolution of the Qur'an infers that many theological, political and social concepts were added later on by Muslim tradition in the 8th and 9th centuries).

Consequently, one might say that because these verses do not exist in their Qur'an, it stands to reason that there will be a large divergence in the way the Muslims explain who God is, who we are, what purpose we have on earth, where it is we are headed, and what we will find once we get there. This hermeneutical key doesn't exist in Islam, and therefore, we have a tool which can help us understand the differences between us.

What I would like to do now is begin listing how this hermeneutical key, **the relationship which God had with man**, features in our two theologies today. Because once we do that, I feel we can then interpret the gospel so much more adequately for the Muslims.

[B] APPLYING THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY:

2) God

A good place to begin our discussion is with God, because that is where our scriptures begin. In the first verse of Genesis we read, "In the beginning God..." As we delineate who this God is we find that the God of the Bible is quite different from that of Allah in Islam.

According to Islam, Allah is one-dimensional; that is he has only one character, which is powerful and imposing (as we noted, almost Aristotelian). He is an omnipotent and impersonal God, one who is completely transcendent, and therefore quite distant and distinct from his creation.

Though Muslims will respond that there are 99 names which depict his character, not one of these names is personal, or denotes a true understanding of a God of love. Muslims say he is merciful and

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compassionate, yet they do not define those terms as we do.

-(**Personal**) The God of the Bible, likewise, is all-powerful, but He is not impersonal. Verses 8 and 9 of Genesis 3 show us that God walks and talks with His creation. He is very personal, and the name He has chosen for Himself, **Yahweh**, delineates His personal character. In the Bible we find this name repeated 6,823 times, more than any other name (note: In the English translation of the Bible this name for God is indicated by capitalizing the letters LORD).

In the Greek New Testament several times God is referred to as **Abba** (which means father) denoting a very close and intimate relationship with His creation. This is unique to the Judeo-Christian understanding of God. A true father not only instructs and protects his children, he loves and is self-sacrificial for them, even to the point of death. Nowhere in any other holy book or philosophy do we find this character of God even intimated.

-**Relational/Sacrificial** Further attributes of Allah point out other differences between a Muslim and Christian concept of God. Allah, because he is not interested personally with his creation loves only those who do his will. Sura 66:12 says, "If you love Allah, follow me, (i.e. Muhammad), Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Allah is forgiving, merciful...Allah directs the hearts of those that believe him..."

The God of the Bible, Yahweh, however, because He desires to be in relationship with His creation, not only loves those who are good, but He loves those who are sinners, even those who reject Him. His love is exemplified in its highest expression, the sacrifice of one for another. Yet, His death on the cross encompassed not just those who loved Him, but all of creation, though its saving power is only efficacious for those who acknowledge it (Romans 5:1-10).

-**Just/Righteous** Islam tells us that Allah is not bound by any moral obligation, as this would limit his sovereignty. Al-Ghazzali, an 11th century Islamic scholar, confirms this in the context of love, stating, "Love is to sense a need of the beloved and since Allah cannot be said to have a need or an experience of a need, it is therefore impossible that Allah should love" (Nehls, Christians Ask Muslims, pg.34).

We would expect to find this in a one-dimensional god. It follows that Allah is also the author of evil. Sura 91:7,8 implies this by saying, "He intimated to it by inspiration its deviating from truth and its piety" (Mishkat III pg.104).

Allah is under no necessity of his own nature to be right, or just. Al-Ghazzali maintains that, "Allah's justice is not to be compared with the justice of man. A Man may be supposed to act unjustly by invading the position of another, but no injustice can be conceived on the part of Allah. It is in his power to pour down torrents upon mankind and if he were to do it, his justice would not be arraigned. There is nothing he can be tied to, to perform, nor can any injustice be supposed of him, nor can he be under obligation to any person whatever" (Nehls, Christians Ask Muslims, pg.28). A Muslim exhibits this twist-of-logic by saying, "Allah does not will an act because it is good; rather, it is good because he has willed it."

Allah is free to be good or evil. The fact that He is both good and evil, proves that He is free for himself only. If Allah has no principles in which he has bound himself to, his justice is likewise unbound. There are no absolutes by which he has bound himself to, and thus mankind has no real boundaries by which to live by, except that which Allah has revealed in his law, making that law the only absolute. Consequently, Allah can be totally capricious in his dealings with man. Allah pronounces his law, though he does not live by it himself. This presupposes no covenant relationship with his created.

In Christianity we find quite a contrast to this notion of a capricious God. The God of the Bible wills not to be evil. As Barth says: "God's freedom constitutes not only His action towards what is outside Himself, but also His own inner being." (Barth, Church Dogmatics Vol.2, Part 1, pg.303) "According to the Biblical testimony, God has the prerogative to be free without being limited by His freedom from external conditioning, free also with regard to His freedom, free not to surrender Himself to it, but to use it, to give

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Himself to this communion, and to practice this faithfulness in it, in this way being really free, free in Himself" (Barth, pg.303). Thus God (*Yahweh*) is free to not be free. He could choose to have no choice, so we must not limit His freedom.

We, on the other hand, are limited by our nature. We cannot walk through walls. Yet there is freedom within that choice, in that we can walk up to and around the walls. God, on the other hand, is unbound by His nature. He can be whatever He wants. He could walk through walls if He so chose. He could also sin if He so chose. Yet **God chooses to limit that choice**, and so He has chosen not to be sinful. His choices became even more limited when He chose to become human. But why did he take on these limitations?

What we know about the Biblical God is that He chose to be in covenant with His creation, thus He chose to limit His power. God, before the world began drew up a charter, to live by certain limitations. It is an eternal covenant (Ephesians 1:9, Colossians 2; 1 Peter 1-2). The Father and the Son covenanted together with respect to their creation.

Consequently the Biblical God is now bound by His character because of that choice, and He is absolutely just and pure. God is infinitely righteous and holy (Psalm 77:13;99:9). What this means is that God, *Yahweh*, is incapable of doing evil, nor could He be attributed as its author, and though He allows evil to exist, it may never share its presence with Him, for, according to Habakkuk 1:13, "His eyes are too pure to look on evil."

When we take these three attributes of the Biblical God: 1) a God who desires a personal relationship with His creation, 2) who is completely selfless and sacrificial in His love, yet, 3) who is unable by His choice to create or accept evil, we find in these three that which sets Him apart from all other gods created by man.

The God of the Bible is, therefore, multi-dimensional. He is both an omnipotent king, and a personal father; both the almighty creator and a sacrificial servant; both righteous judge and redeeming priest.

Perhaps for many these categories seem contradictory, and that is just as well, for God does not choose to stoop to the categories of men. His character is beyond our feeble wisdom. What these characteristics of God do reveal, however, is that they could not have originated within a one-dimensional and impersonal god, such as we find in the Allah of Islam. No, they could only be explained within the context of a multi-dimensional God, one who is both three and one, or, what the church has chosen to call the *trinity*. Yet, it is this very term which has caused so much derision by both non-Christians and Muslims alike.

3) TRINITY:

"How," many people today ask, "can God be both three and one?" Furthermore, they continue, "why is this so important?"

It is important primarily because we find God revealed in the scriptures as both three and one. The first clues to what God is like is found almost immediately, in fact, in the very first verse of Genesis, where we read, "In the beginning God created..." The word for God (*Elohim*) is plural, so God is plural. The word created (*Bara*) which follows, however, is singular. Therefore, in this first verse we find that a plural God creates as one. This is echoed again in the same chapter, verse 26, where God speaks to Himself saying: "Let **us** make man in **our** own image, in **our** likeness."

As we continue on through the Old Testament we find many inferences to the plurality, yet oneness of the godhead (Genesis 3:22; and 11:7; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 6:8; 7:14; 9:6; 44:6; and 63:7-10). The New Testament, likewise, carries the theme on from where the Old Testament left off, many times stating that God expresses Himself in a multi-dimensional capacity (John 1:1-5,10-12; 8:58; Luke 7:49; Colossians 1:19,16-17; Philippians 2:6-7; Rom.9:4-5; II Corinthians 4:4; Titus 2:11-14; and Hebrews

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1:2-3).

-It Explains the Love of God: But to understand why this concept of the trinity is important for our present discussion, it may be helpful to use as an example the idea of the love of God, a belief which both Christians and Muslims can agree upon (though our definitions may vary, as evidenced in al-Ghazzali's quote earlier, where he intimates God's love as mercy and compassion). It is not until we comprehend the trinity (a doctrine much maligned by Muslims) that we can truly understand love. For it is within the trinity that love is fully expressed.

True love by its very nature requires an object, otherwise it becomes self-centred, self-serving and carnal. If God were one-dimensional, where would true love have originated? How could love have existed before creation if there was no object on which it could be expressed? **The trinity, encompassing the triune godhead, delineates the source from which love began, as each person of the godhead, since eternity, has given and received love from among themselves.** The best example of the love between the godhead is exemplified by God the Father who sent God the Son to earth (John 3:16); and by God the Son, who in turn "being in very nature God...made Himself nothing...being made in human likeness...He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

As a result of this extreme act of love, we humans, being made in the image of God, can now explain and model perfect love to the world, using the examples of God the Father towards God the Son, and the ongoing relationship of God the Holy Spirit in our lives counselling us to become more like Him, by exemplifying that same love.

When Muslims maintain that Allah can be defined as the God of love our response must be that this claim simply makes no sense. For where did it originate, and from where is it exemplified in history, or in Islam today? Realistically speaking, love can only be understood within the context of a multi-dimensional God, where it was not only originally modelled within Himself, but continues even now as He aids us in that same endeavour, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

God, as three in one, then, helps explain why relationships between one person and another are so important, and why we humans are such 'social animals.' Having been made in God's image, it stands to reason that we would reflect these very significant attributes of God, a God who has eternally been in relationship within the trinity.

One can, moreover, understand why God desires that same relationship with His created. And with that in mind, we can now introduce our next category, God's highest creation: humanity.

4) HUMANITY:

Here again, by using the hermeneutical key of relationship we find a vast divergence between the view of humanity in Islam and that of Christianity.

Because Allah is considered to be totally transcendent, his creation shares none of his character. Humans enjoy a unique place in creation, because Allah breathed into Adam his spirit (Sura 15:29). But the Qur'an never explains what the Spirit of Allah does. What we do know is that humans were created to be Allah's representative, or his vicegerent on earth (Suras 2:30; 33:72; 35:39). Thus, humans have the task to maintain the earth.

The relationship between Allah and his creatures is one built upon obedience and fear, what the Qur'an calls **Taqwa** (which when translated means self-protection or fear of God). Humans are no more than slaves to Allah; their sole requirement to obey their creator. In fact the word *Muslim* has come to mean "one who obeys, or submits."

-In God's Image: Christians, likewise, believe that humans were created to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). But that is only half

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the story, for the Bible tells us that humans were created in God's image (Genesis 2:27), a view which is in direct contrast to that of Islam, which perceives humans as slaves to Allah. According to the Bible, we were never created to be slaves. We were created, from the very beginning, to be His children, in perfect relationship with Him.

We see clearly from Genesis chapter 3 that God walked and talked with Adam. This implies that Adam had a higher status than simply that of a caretaker. Indeed, a relationship is evidenced between Adam and God; a relationship which was worked out within a context of equality, in that God, the second person of the trinity, confined Himself by taking on all the limited characteristics of Adam's finite existence, such as the need to walk, to search and even to call out when He couldn't find Adam in the garden.

-Freedom of Choice: Conversely, because Adam was made in God's image he had the capacity to choose, to make up his own mind. This stands against the concept of slavery, as a slave has no freedom to choose. Freedom of choice entails that one can accept or reject something, in this case a relationship with God, despite the fact that He is their creator. Adam was given that choice, with tragic consequences, and we, each one of us, are likewise confronted with the choice to accept or reject God.

Though Muslims testify to the superiority of Allah, because he is only one-dimensional, they fail to take into account that which is missing, that which Allah cannot offer. Allah, because of his overwhelming omnipotence cannot accept the possibility of rejection by those he creates. In fact, all that Allah can offer is that his disciples follow him blindly. The penalty for apostasy is death. While the Qur'an mentions nothing about a death penalty for apostasy, the Hadith attribute numerous occasions when he demanded it. He is purported to have said, "Slay him who changes his religion" (Gibb and Kramers, pg.413), and at another time a set of traditions reports his ruling that it is permissible to take the life of someone who "abandons his religion and separates himself from his community" (Gibb and Kramers, pg.413).

In contrast, the God of the Bible does not seek a blind obedience from His creation, nor does He demand any sort of capital punishment for those who reject Him. For that would not illustrate true love. **True love seeks the best for the loved-one, at the owner's expense.** This sacrificial love is best exemplified in the crucifixion of Christ, the 2nd person of the trinity, on the cross. It is this same quality of love which God desires from us, both in our relationship with Him, and in our relationships with all of humanity, who are made in His image, sinner and saved alike. Made in His image, and therefore free to choose to accept or reject His love for us, brings us to the fifth category where Islam and Christianity differ: sin.

5) SIN

In both the Qur'anic and Biblical accounts of Eden, we find that Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit. Yet, for both Islam and Christianity the consequences of that sin are quite different.

According to Islam, since there was no special relationship between man and God in the garden, there was nothing which could be lost by Adam's sin. Consequently, the sin of Adam was his and his alone. In fact, not much ado is made of his sin in the Qur'an. According to Muslims it was an act of disobedience for which Adam, and he alone, was responsible. Once he repented of the sin, God simply forgave him and extended to him his mercy and guidance (Sura 20:122). Nothing needed to be repaired, because nothing substantial had been broken. The matter is then left to rest.

-Adam was sinless: In the Biblical account, the story is altogether different. Adam's sin was taken much more seriously. It is not difficult for us to understand why in light of Genesis 3. As we know, before the sin of Adam and Eve, Eden was a garden which was perfect. There was no blemish, and as such it was a place in which God could come and be in relationship with Adam, the two communing openly. There was nothing between them which could impede their relationship.

-Adam became sinful: Once the fruit was eaten, however, that relationship was completely

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altered. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and, suddenly, like God, they could now understand right from wrong (Genesis 3:22).

Note: the idea of **fall** comes from Origen in his work "Peri-archon." In his overwrought fantasy the small logoses (all created beings) turn round and round the real Logos contemplating him. They fell, however, when they began to contemplate themselves [*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.4, pg.256-260]. The fall, therefore, is a misnomer. It would perhaps be more correct to call it the **divorce**, or **separation**.

Before they had been in total innocence and only knew that which was right (Genesis 1:31). They were naked but felt no shame. Now, however, they covered their bodies with leaves to hide their shame, and hid behind trees to hide their guilt. They were in perfect relationship with their surroundings. There were no thorns and the earth bore its fruit readily. Now, however, this relationship had also been impaired, so that Adam had to toil for his food (Genesis 3:17). But most importantly, their relationship with God was now totally broken, because sin had entered into the world. In other words, they, who were now in sin had to be removed from Him who knew no sin. Thus due to the fall, they were dismissed from God's presence.

-Adam was thrown out of Eden: This one seemingly small bite from the fruit had eternal consequences, one which would affect the entire shape of history. Not only was corruption and death introduced into the world by this little bite, but more devastating, humanity's unique relationship with the Lord was annulled, causing Adam and Eve, and along with them all their descendants, including us, to be banished from God's presence.

The fruit was probably the most expensive the world has ever known. Though it may have been a small blemish for the fruit, it incurred an enormous blemish for all of mankind, and that's the bad news. But fortunately, we serve a God who desires above all else to remain in relationship with us, His created. We know that the story doesn't end with the garden of Eden. We know that God has made a way for us to get back in relationship with Him.

6) THE CROSS/ATONEMENT:

This then brings us to the sixth category for delineating how the hermeneutical key of Genesis 3 helps us understand the nature of God and ourselves.

In the previous section we mentioned that sin separated us from God and needed to be repaired. God ordained in the Old Testament that after sins were committed, the offender should seek to atone for them in order to be reconciled with God (Leviticus 4:21,26,35). The way this should be done was stipulated in great detail in the book of Leviticus. It was by means of a sacrifice. In fact the word atonement appears 79 times in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament the place of an animal sacrifice was taken by Jesus, who suffered in the place of the offender once for all (Hebrews 9:12,14,26-27; 10:10).

Ironically, the word for atonement is found only once in the New Testament. We know from the Bible, therefore, that our relationship with God has been repaired by means of this sacrifice, this atonement on the cross.

Muslims disagree with this, reasoning that it would be unjust of God to punish the innocent for the offence of the guilty. Jesus (the just) cannot suffer for someone else's sin (that of the unjust) for this would be offensive to God's concept of righteousness and justice. Each person, they believe, must pay the penalty for their own sin. What the Qur'an does not teach, is that the penalty for sin is death. Sin, for them, can merely be forgiven with a few words of pardon from Allah. Death is not required.

It is for this reason that the death of one of God's prophets is appalling to Muslims. Why would Allah allow prophets to die? God has promised to protect his prophets, yet ironically the Qur'an does admit that prophets did suffer and die in Sura 3:183.

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To say that God, while in the form of a man, died is even more audacious, as it not only implies the inadequacy of Allah to protect His prophets, but assumes that God as a man could not even protect Himself!

Consequently no atoning death is needed. Muhammad taught that the shedding of blood for the sacrifice of one's sin did not bring forgiveness in Suras 6:164 and 53:38. (There is, however, a curious passage in Sura 5:32 which seems to allow the shedding of one man's blood as a blessing of many, alluding perhaps to the possibility of an atonement by one for the many).

Christians, on the other hand, believe that blood is required for an atonement. Furthermore, we believe that Christ as God on the cross is the only means by which complete atonement can be achieved. Atonement means a reconciliation with God after having rebelled against Him by breaking the covenant that He made with humanity, which is sin.

Atonement demands the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). It is not sufficient to simply say someone is forgiven. It should not be difficult for Muslims to understand this, as they are familiar with the sacrifice of Ishmael, and that of Cain versus Abel. It is part of their history as well. Yet, they continue to question why so much of Old Testament history, and that which is revealed in the previous scriptures speak of blood sacrifices? Have they bothered to question why they must sacrifice a goat at *Eid*; or why the goat must be unblemished? These are 'typologies' as well as bridges which we can use with the Muslims to introduce the need for atonement.

Sin demands a punishment in order for justice to be served (Romans 6:23). The offender deserves to be punished, to be put to death. Since sin separates us from God, atonement reverses that process by returning us to God.

By punishing sin with death God expresses His righteousness (providing for the justice demanded by the sin), and by taking the punishment on Himself, He expresses His mercy. Apart from this there is no way for a righteous God to punish the heinousness of the sin and yet be merciful as well.

Both Muslims and Christians believe in justice. **Justice is getting what we deserve.** We deserve to die. **Mercy**, which both Muslims and Christians believe in, **is not getting what we deserve.** Yet, we don't deserve to be pardoned if sin has not been dealt with. That is a false pardon, but it is that which Islam offers. What is needed is grace. We don't deserve pardon, because we have not paid for our sins. Yet, God, by His atonement on the cross has paid for our sin, which we receive by His grace. Therefore, **Grace is getting what we don't deserve.** Only Christ on the cross fulfills the price of sin, death, and provides the atonement for those who acknowledge that God has bought them back a second time (i.e. the story of 'little John' and his boat: "Little boat you are mine two times; I first made you, and then I bought you back again."). But we are getting ahead of the story, for Muslims would balk at such a suggestion, that God would come and associate amongst his creation, let alone die for that same creation.

7) THE INCARNATION:

It is anathema for a Muslim to accept that the perfect omnipotent God would choose to pollute Himself by coming amongst his creation and live among them. Take for instance the pronouncement of the Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat who identifies humanity as equalling worms, or maggots. He says,

"These worms, you know, that go on manure, human dung. You and I according to this book of God, you are nothing more than a maggot...God Almighty goes out of His way to tell you. Look, this Jesus of mine is no exception...this Son of Man, who is only a worm, worm, a worm! (shouting out the word)."

It is not surprising then, that with such a chasm between Allah and his creation there is no room for the incarnation in Islam, because it implies that Allah needed to do something to help humanity, almost as if he had to correct a mistake, his mistake.

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Muslims would not say that Allah is incapable of doing this, but that it is against His character to do so. For proof, they point to the complete humanness of Jesus. How would God debase Himself so?

Since Jesus had all the characteristics of a human, they throw the problem back into our laps, contending that this fact alone is proof that Christians started from the perspective of humanity and simply elevated a man to the position of God. For a Muslim this act is considered the most heinous of sins, as it is simple idolatry, what the Qur'an refers to as "Shirk" (see Suras 4:48; 5:75-76; and 41:6).

For Christians, the incarnation, on the other hand, stands as one of the cardinal examples of God's love for His creation. God, desiring to be in relationship with humanity, as we noticed earlier, takes the initiative and comes Himself as a human.

What better way to communicate than to enter into relationship with the people with whom you want to communicate, be one of them, live with them, speak their language, cry with them, and use their methods and world-view to better explain your truth (Romans 10:14-15). It is much the same model we use as missionaries when going cross-culture.

We must remember that it was God who came down to the garden with Adam, and incarnated Himself there. If He did it at that time, then why should we be surprised if He chose to do it again?

Since Muslims don't have this incarnational story in their Qur'an, it stands to reason that they cannot perceive God in that role. In what capacity was He there? Is this an incarnation, or a theophany? Most likely it was the later.

Muslims are not aware of the **theophanies** which many Christians believe are found in our scriptures: such as Genesis 18:1-33 where He came as Abraham's visitor; or in Genesis 32:25-30 where He wrestled with Jacob; or in Exodus 3:2-5 at the burning bush with Moses (also mentioned in the Qur'an, Sura 27:8-9); or in Exodus 13:21 where He appeared as pillars of cloud and fire leading the Israelites; and later in Exodus 33:9-11 and Numbers 12:5-9 appearing as a cloud at the tent of Meeting with Moses Aaron and Miriam; and finally in Judges 2:1 where He came as an angel at Bokim. Take special note that God specifically states that he speaks to Moses "mouth to mouth...that he [Moses] beholds the form of the Lord" when they speak, in Numbers 12:7-8.

Once Muslims understand that the supreme incarnation, Jesus Christ, had entered time and space before, it will then be easier for them to understand that God could come down again as the Christ, 2,000 years ago.

They will also then understand that in His desire to be continually in relationship with us, He continues even till this day to incarnate Himself by means of His Holy Spirit.

Yet, though we can understand why God would want to incarnate Himself, so as to better communicate His truth to us, that is only half the picture. He did not simply come to earth to reveal the gospel. He came also to repair that relationship with His creation which had been broken at the very beginning, in the garden of Eden; thus the two-fold purpose of Christ's ministry which is completely lost in an Islamic context. The reason it is lost can be blamed on their revelation, the Qur'an, which, like our own scriptures is the foundation for most of what they believe, and the theme of our eighth category.

8) REVELATION:

Islam tells us that Allah is remote and therefore must not reveal himself to man upon a personal level. It is for that reason that Allah reveals himself by means of appointed prophets, who are referred to as, **rasul**, meaning "the sent one." These prophets are merely human and so finite, yet they are protected by God. Revelation in Islam is simply one-way, from God to man via the prophets. The final revelation, and therefore the most important, according to Muslims, is the Qur'an. It was revealed to Muhammad between A.D. 610-632, via the angel Gabriel, using a process known as **Nazala** which means 'to descend', implying a word-for-word transmission.

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Thus, Muslims believe that the exact Arabic words that we find in the Qur'an are those which exist eternally on the original stone tablets, in heaven.

Since Allah is infinite and transcendent, it stands to reason that his revelation would be infinite and transcendent. For instance, according to Sura 85:21 and 22, we read, "Nay this is a glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a tablet preserved." Muslim scholars admit that this passage refers to the tablets which were never created. They contend that the Qur'an is an absolute 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* (verse) between one version and another.

The Qur'an comes from the "Mother of books," according to Sura 43:3. There is thus no other book or revelation which can compare. In fact, three times, in Suras 2:23, 10:37-38, and 17:88 we find the challenge to, "Present some other Sura or book of equal beauty."

This final revelation then, 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 above any criticism. Yet, when we look more carefully at the text which we have in our possession today, that (supposedly) 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 other codices of Abdullah Masoud, Abu Musa, and Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, all of which have deviations and deletions between them (see Arthur Jeffrey's Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an). We are also puzzled by the many errors and contradictions in its text, as well as the numerous second century heretical Jewish 'Talmudic' accounts found within its pages.

Other problems concern its very pronouncements. Because of its seeming transcendence we are obliged not to question its content, much of which originates (we are told) from the later Medinan period of Muhammad's life (the last 10 years). These Suras consist primarily of rules and regulations for seventh to ninth century social, economical, and political structures, leaving us with a document which is ill adapted to the twentieth century.

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 (i.e. worship styles, music, dress).

As a result the Bible is much more adaptable and constructive for our societies today. Since we do not have a concept of *Nazala* revelation, we have no fear of delving into and trying to understand the context of what the author was trying to say (philological analysis).

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.

Perhaps this is the crux of the problem between the two 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. His beauty, power and intricate wisdom is displayed in 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."

But God also chooses to reveal Himself more specifically; what those same scholars call "special

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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 urge 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.

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 (which we will refer to later). This is consistent with a God who is personally involved with His creation.

Simply speaking, God Himself came to reveal Himself to humanity. To do this 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 human would better understand Him who is beyond all human understanding.

As we find 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. One may prefer to call it a secondary revelation, as it is simply the witness by men to the revelation of God. The Bible tells about His life, speaking about what He said and did, and then expounds upon these teachings for the world today. Consequently, it is a book which points to a person. 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.

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 truest 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. 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, since they are both considered as the Word of God, and stand as God's truest revelation to humanity.

The Bible (especially the New Testament), consequently, is the testimony of Jesus's companions, testifying about what He said and did. To take this a step further, we could compare the Bible with their traditions, the *Hadith*, the *Tarikh*, the *Sira* and the *Tafsir*, all of which comment upon the life 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 while the New Testament speaks mostly about what Jesus said, about His message, it has little to say concerning what He did, whereas the Muslim traditions talk primarily about the life of Muhammad, what he did, with interpretations of what he said.

In this light, there is no comparison between the two revelations, Jesus and the Qur'an. The

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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 (Sura 19:19 & Hebrew 1), who, according to His sinless word is God Himself, and therefore, the perfect revelation.

In light of Genesis 3 we would expect God to reveal Himself in this way, because that is what someone who desires a truly loving relationship would do, versus a God who manipulates and controls us much as a robot or a mannequin. This then introduces our ninth category, that of predestination.

9) PREDESTINATION: (i.e. where you find yourself when you've missed your train)

Sura 9:51 says "Nothing shall ever befall upon us except what Allah has ordained for us." For many Muslims the idea that Allah has total control over all that happens, including history, gives them the security they crave.

The popular phrase "*Insh'allah*", which means "if Allah wills it," reflects this mentality.

All our actions both good and bad, they believe, are controlled by Allah. Consequently, it is Allah who brings about evil and good. There is no personal choice, and consequently no assurance of salvation, as it is Allah who decides what is to happen to us (Sura 16:93,95). What Muslims fail to acknowledge is that this belief smacks of the mechanical doctrine of predestination, a non-questioning acceptance of destiny and a resignation to fate, commonly termed ***Kismet*** (or ***Qismah***) in Arabic, much like a master to a slave or an engineer to a robot.

This is total determinism. Humanity is judged and condemned for what they cannot help doing. This is also total injustice. One would expect such from a non-personal god, one who seeks total obedience. Gone is any hope of free will or free choice.

For some, Allah's complete control leads to a fatalism and passivity; while for others it frees the mind from matters over which it has absolutely no control. Kismet makes the Muslim fanatically self-sacrificing in war, yet resigned in defeat or in bereavement or in disaster, or in the presence of preventable evil such as epidemics (because these could fall under the "will of Allah").

Without the context of relationship one would expect Allah to be in total control, his creation accepting his authority without questioning, as a puppet with its maker.

Christianity, however, views this relationship quite differently. The Bible stands against the idea of a total pre-destination of humanity. While there is some room for interpretation within scripture concerning whether God totally predestines or merely has foreknowledge of our choices (reflected in the two traditions which speak to this issue best: Reformed vs. Arminian thinking), it might be helpful to remember that these views are only argued within the context of one's salvation.

Many Christians believe that we are given the option of free-will, that we are given the option to accept our saviour or reject Him (notwithstanding the theology of election). God woos us, and we respond. Depending on our decision, we are either saved or condemned, but the decision rests with us. This form of choice reflects what a lover would do for his loved one. One cannot demand love, it must be earned. We respond to God's love by accepting Him, because He first loved us, and made it possible for us to respond freely to that love. A true relationship, by its very nature, requires the possibility for both acceptance and rejection. Therefore, it is this kind of relationship between the creator and His created which is unique to the God of the Bible.

10) THEOCRACY:

The tenth category which I would like to deal with is that of the Kingdom of God, and follows on from our discussion on predestination, in that if we begin with a God who controls us so completely, then we would expect his kingdom to reflect that same control.

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A transcendent God would desire a transcendent kingdom, where he would have absolute authority. The term for this kingdom in Islam is ***Khilafah***, which constitutes a theocratic state on earth, controlled by the dictates of Allah, and maintained as an aspiration for all Muslims.

Allah's blueprint for all of life is best exemplified by the control which would be established within the *Khilafah*, and would include social, political, economical, legal (***Shari'ah***) and religious functions. Modelled upon a seventh-ninth century scenario, with a ***Caliph*** at the head, it would be supported by a hierarchy of religious leaders (***Ulema***) who would be chosen from within the circle of ***Dar-al-Islam*** (house of Islam).

Jacques Ellul in his writings speaks of cities as the epitome of rebellion against God. Cities, he believes, are man's extreme attempt for security, to be their own gods, to be in control, and away from the authority of God. Theocracy has much the same desire. One might argue that this view of the Kingdom of God found within Islam, the *Khilafa*, parallels what we find in Ellul's cities, an attempt to create structures of security for ourselves, which in the end merely take over and supplant God.

Christianity, on the other hand perceives itself as made up of individuals who are sojourners passing through this world. This is not our home. Indeed, our home is where God is, in heaven, or with the Holy Spirit on earth. We yearn and desire to be with Him at all times.

While on earth, our security is with Him, via the Holy Spirit. Thus our relationship with Him, in whatever environment we find ourselves (either belligerent or welcoming), is what we seek after. We have no need for a physical Kingdom of God, as He is with us wherever we are. Because our security is in His hands, we have no need to recreate that security.

We, therefore, are not fearful of belligerent kingdoms, and ironically, historically we have thrived under persecution. Perhaps that is because sometimes it takes persecution to eradicate our carnal securities, to put us back on the "cutting edge," and bring us back into God's security, back into relationship with Him. Thus, we stand against a theocracy.

Speaking of history, Christianity has a number of examples of failed theocracies, such as: Solomon's kingdom, Constantine's religious state in the 4th century, the Reformation experiment in Geneva during the 1500's, and colonialism in this century. All of these are examples of failed human attempts to create their own security, while erroneously using the name of God for their authority, much as Islam continues to do.

One cannot talk of a *Khilafa* state without also bringing into the picture the means by which it is installed, that which Muslims term ***Jihad***, or "striving." While many Muslims are quick to point out that this only refers to peaceful forms of ***Da'wah*** (which means "to invite"), much as we have in our own missionary activity, history has shown that much of the expansion across North Africa, and into the southern reaches of Turkey, and also into India (under Aurangzeb) was carried out by forceful conquest, followed by an "Islamic Ambience" (i.e. influencing from above, by implementing ***Dhimmi*** laws as well as ***Jizya*** and ***Kharaj*** tax on the 'unbelievers').

Perhaps an easy example for today would be that of the existing Islamic countries which refuse to open themselves up for the propagation of the gospel. It is understandable why a religion which is rigid and transcendental would require such a violent and rigid means of propagation and consolidation.

Compare that with Christianity, where we are never invoked towards violence but are demanded specifically to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them..." (Matt.28:19-20). We know that we are merely the vessels of the Word of God, 'a pen in the hands of a ready-writer.' It is the Holy Spirit who has the task to convict and bring men and women to God. God Himself, who desires to bring His creation back to Himself, does so Himself. We are His mouthpiece, through which the Holy Spirit can work. And that brings us to our 11th category, that of the Spirit World.

11) THE SPIRIT WORLD:

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Islam perceives the world within a Dualistic framework, which some believe was borrowed from Aristotelian thought (discussed earlier). Therefore, much of the current Muslim superstitions surrounding the fear of *Jinns* and spirits do not belong within an orthodox understanding of Islam. In fact, most scholars today point to pre-Islamic Arabic religions, which incorporated many *Jinns* in their beliefs, for the influence of demons and *Jinn* in Islam. Theologically speaking, Islam has no “excluded middle” (the area between the platonic heaven and earth where spirits dwell). Consequently, Folk Islam has evolved over the centuries to fill this gap, this heart-felt need, which is evidenced in so many Muslim communities. Interestingly, folk Islamic practices are now found in approximately two-thirds of the Islamic world, and are a deep embarrassment to those from the more orthodox backgrounds.

Allah, who is impersonal, does not involve himself in the day-to-day goings-on of humanity. He does not intersect time and space, and work amongst his creation, and therefore does not fulfill the need, which all humans have, to be in contact with something bigger than themselves.

Christianity, which accepts God as personal, acknowledges the spirit world. Jesus often speaks about it, and warns against the evil forces which Satan controls. Yet, He doesn't just leave His creation open to the whims of the evil one, but promises power over him and his cohorts by means of the Holy Spirit.

One would expect a personal God to value His contact with His creation, while providing a defence against those evil powers which seek to thwart His rule, as we find in Christianity.

12) PRAYER:

Along those same lines, a God who desires relationship with His creation would also desire to communicate with them on an ongoing basis.

In Islam we find that individuals can only communicate to Allah by means of certain prescribed prayers, many of which are memorized and repeated verbatim, without any thought of a response from God. It is a one-way communication.

In Christianity prayer is not at all conceived within the framework of a programmed formula. We wouldn't converse to a friend this way, nor to our wife or husband, and certainly not to Him who is the focus of our life, our Saviour and Lord. Relationship requires a two-way communication, so we would expect that a loving God who desires our relationship would willingly and joyfully respond to our requests and praises to Him.

(i.e. note the programmed nature of the 5 pillars of Islam, the well known exercises which are at the centre of Islamic practice: ***Shahada***= a programmed oath, ***Salat***= a programmed communication, ***Sawm***= a programmed penitence, ***Hajj***= a programmed fellowship, ***Zakat***= a programmed giving)

13) PARADISE:

The final category which I will deal with is that of paradise, or heaven. In Islam, Paradise is a garden, with rivers (some of wine), fruits and large eyed virgins (***Houris***); a very carnal and man-centred environment (Suras 55:56; 56:22,35-36), reflecting again a seventh-ninth century Middle Eastern mentality.

Ironically, in Islam, men are promised the very things which they must abstain from in this life. Nowhere is there any mention of Allah in relationship with his creation in paradise. He is conspicuously absent. The Islamic aversion towards any contact between the creator and his created continues even till the end. Mankind is relegated to spending eternity filling up on fruit, wine and women.

Christianity, however, has a completely contrasting view of heaven to that of Islam, one that is not carnal, nor man-centred, but absolutely God-centred. For it is here, in heaven, that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve finally return to a full relationship with God. In heaven Eden is realized as it should have been. We are once again walking and talking with God, but in a new and invigorated garden.

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In heaven the incarnation of God is fully realized, so that the relationship which He had intended from the very beginning comes to fruition. In heaven we come full circle. For every individual who accepts and acknowledges Christ's relationship with them, brought about by means of the cross while on earth, will be allowed into a perfect and eternal relationship with God in heaven, as He had intended from the beginning.

CONCLUSION:

So what can we say concerning this new hermeneutical key which we find in verses 8 and 9 of Genesis 3? Does it help us to better understand the gulf which exists between our two faiths? Can it be used to explain the Muslim and Christian views concerning who God is, who we are, and what God intends for us?

I believe it can. To conclude let us consider a number of important distinctions between that which we believe and that which the Muslims believe. If we use this hermeneutic as a key to compare between our two faiths we find that:

ISLAM'S POSITION

1) on the one hand, when we consider the Allah of Islam, we are confronted with a one-dimensional **transcendent God** who neither desires, nor is able to have a relationship with his creation.

2) On the one hand within Islam we find **humanity** created to serve and obey Allah, their sole responsibility that of vicegerents on earth.

3) On the one hand we find an Allah who is totally one-dimensional, and singular, which excludes any possibility of how or where **love** and relationship originated.

4) On the one hand we find within Islam a concept of **sin** which is cheap and simplistic, because it does not take into account that which sin has destroyed, the relationship which only humans enjoy with their creator. Nor does it take into account the consequences of sin, which is **death**, both physical and spiritual.

5) On the one hand, because of Genesis 3, we can now understand why Islam fails to acknowledge an

CHRISTIANITY'S POSITION

1) On the other hand, within the Biblical account we find substance to the concept of love and sin, because it is fashioned not only within the context of the Godhead but reflected within the **relationship between the creator and His created**. Love which creates the relationship, and sin, which destroys it.

2) On the other hand the Bible views the creation of **humanity** within the terms of a relationship, with a God who creates Adam to be much more than just a vicegerent of the earth, but created to be His child whom He loves.

3) On the other hand we find that the fountainhead for relationship and **love** is exemplified within the Godhead itself, and is adequately described by the **trinity**, because only in the context of a God who is both three and one can true love have originated, which engenders relationship one with another, and which in turn gives us, who are made in His image, that same character.

4) On the other hand the Bible not only acknowledges the heinousness of **sin**, and its consequence, but it speaks of a response, provided by God Himself on the cross, a more than adequate **atonement** for our sins, restoring that relationship with God which He had intended with Adam in the garden of Eden.

5) On the other hand, within a Christian framework, we would expect **God** to take on the

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incarnational God, as this would **pollute** his character.

6) On the one hand we find the final **revelation** of Islam a mere book, the **Qur'an**, an echo of its creator, supposedly, though a book, totally transcendent, final, cold and non-verifiable.

7) On the one hand, the cross and the atonement for Muslims make no sense, since without any true concept of the **separation** with God which sin causes, there is no need for a reparation, and thus no need for an atonement, or a saviour.

8) On the one hand a transcendent God would necessarily require a transcendent kingdom, exemplified in the **Khilafa**, a structured hierarchical entity which controls all aspects of human life, much as a master would control a slave. It would follow that the means by which individuals are brought in to the *Khilafa*, *Jihad*, also reflects this same distant and nonpersonal thinking.

9) On the one hand a dualistic world, as Islam personifies, leaves no room for the work of God amongst His people. **Allah**, because he is distant, remains **distant**, not even attempting to communicate personally with his creation, demanding instead a blind and complete obedience to his **rules** and regulations.

10) And finally, on the one hand without any understanding of Allah in relationship with humanity, Islam delivers a view of **paradise** which is quite **carnal** and man-centred, an escape to all the desires which man is to repress in this life, with no inference at all to Allah's presence. And humanly speaking, that possibly makes sense.

form of a **human** since He had previously done so not only in Genesis 3 but subsequently as well, choosing to enter time and space to communicate and relate with His creation, both in history and now, by means of the **Holy Spirit**.

6) On the other hand the **revelation** which we hold most dear is that of God Himself, in the person of **Jesus** on earth. The Bible, which is merely a book written by men, though inspired, is only a secondary account of what the true revelation, Jesus, said and did, and to which we can refer to in order to better know who God is, and what He intends for our lives.

7) On the other hand because Christianity is the only faith which points to the dilemma of a creator separated from His creation, through no fault of His own, it is the only faith, likewise, which adequately provides an answer to the separation which we all feel with our creator, a **solution** rendered by the creator, Himself, on the **cross** 2,000 years ago.

8) On the other hand the Biblical perception of God's children is that of **sojourners**, incorporating, voluntarily, the kingdom within their hearts, in anticipation of the final and **eternal kingdom** of God, which we yearn for, but which we will only experience on the other side of death.

9) On the other hand **Yahweh** of the Bible, because He truly desires a relationship desires equally to communicate and involve Himself intrinsically with His creation; responding to **prayers**, while guiding and protecting His loved ones much as we would expect a true **father** to do.

10) On the other hand **heaven** for a Christian is where the relationship, broken at the time of Eden, is finally and completely restored; where the creator reunites with His created, coming full circle to offer humanity the life which He had intended for them from the very beginning, to be with Him in **perfect relationship for eternity**. Now this makes more sense.

So, essentially, what we have found in this discussion is that without a view of a God who is in relationship with His creation, all the other ramifications of our lives fall into a cold and calculated man-

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centred existence, devoid of God's presence. Until Muslims understand that God is not just a one-dimensional transcendent being, but personal and loving, they won't be able to understand the reason or the possibility for a loving God who can and did come to earth to rectify the moral dilemma of our sin.

And until they begin to step back and take a critical look at the authority for their beliefs: the Qur'an, Muslims will be condemned to limit their view of reality to that of the dualistic, black and white hues which it proposes, while neglecting the myriad of colours which reflect the true revelation of a God seeking to relate to each of His creation, personally, and in accordance to their individual needs, so that we all can live with Him in relationship, as was intended in the garden of Eden.

Furthermore, until Muslims see God and Man in the context of a loving relationship, as they originally were in Eden, they won't understand why sin has caused so much damage. Nor will they understand why we need to repair that which has gone wrong.

Islam, without a concept of the personal loving and sacrificial God, only has half the picture. God as Abba father wants to be in relationship with me and you His children, now more than ever before. The good news is that the possibility for a repaired relationship has been provided by God, both because of what happened on the cross 2,000 years ago, and subsequently, because of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. We don't have to wait for the "pie in the sky when we die, but can enjoy the steak on our plate while we wait." It is that which gives us hope.

What remains is for us to speak, and go out and offer to our Muslim friends that which their revelation cannot offer; a true view of the creator-God in relationship with His creation; a relationship which, because of the fruit, was temporarily broken, but which, because of the cross, can be repaired at any time, anywhere, and by any one, loved and un-loved alike.

(overview next page)

HERMENEUTICAL KEY OUTLINE

Similarities: Monotheism, similar history, prophets, scriptures, moral teachings & volition.

Differences: We also have differences. To best understand them, we need to go to the beginning, to **Genesis 3:8-9**.

	<u>Islam</u>	<u>Christianity</u>
1) Garden of Eden:	1) Not on earth: (Suras 2:30-39; 7:19-25; 20:116-123). No relationship/man, except via the Spirit (Ruh), or Gabriel	1) On earth: Genesis 3:8-9 - God walks & talks with man = Limits Himself - Response expected- in <u>Relationship</u> /man
2) God:	2) Distant, transcendent, is merciful to those who do his will, a master to be obeyed.	2) Personal, <i>Yahweh</i> , <i>Abba</i> Relational/Sacrificial, Just/Righteous (Ps.77:13; 99:9; Hab.1:13), loves His enemies
3) Trinity	3) <i>Wahid</i> , god is only one dimensional.	3) plural godhead (Gen.1:1,26; 3:22; 11:7; Deut.6:4; Jn.8:58) explained by >God is Love=
4) Humanity	4) relation to god = <i>Taqwa</i> = fear of God, Muslim = one who obeys, born as Muslim, no choice, slave	4) Made in God=s Image (Gen. 1:27), as a child of God=s, not born Christian, Freedom to choose.
5) Sin	5) Adam=s disobedience, was forgiven & banished to earth-Why? No relationship	5) Adam was sinless (perfect) = in relationship with God. He sinned-

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	existed/God, so none lost. Sin=breaking God=s law - no corruption, just weakness to Satan=s seduction	>(imperfect) knew right & wrong, broke trust, hid, evicted from Eden, lost relationship with God (Men & nature), God = pure & holy (Ps.77:13; 99:9) & no sin in His presence (Hab.1:13), separates us (Is.59:1-2)
6) Atonement	6) Consequence of Sin = punishment alone, Shedding of blood doesn=t bring forgiveness. Innocent cannot take place of the guilty = unjust (S.6:164; 53:38). God must not die, shows inadequacy of God. Why then Eid sacrifices?	6) Consequences of sin = death, (Eze.18:20; Rom.6:23). Thus need Atonement (Lev.4:21,26,35). 79 times in OT, 1 in NT. Sin separates & atonement redeems. Atonement needs blood (Heb.9:22) Demanded by Abraham (Gen.22), fulfilled in Christ on the cross (Heb.9:12,14,26-27; 10:10)
7) Incarnation:	7) Chasm between god/man, no pollution, Jesus Christ -> God = <i>Shirk</i> (S.4:48, 5:75-76; 41:6) (S.27:8-9?)	7) Made in his image, so came as man (Gen.1:27) Best communication= <i>Emmanuel</i> = God with us; <i>Theophanies</i> (Phil.2:7-8) Jesus Christ came to eradicate sin & repair the lost relationship.
8) Revelation:	8) Qur=an = <i>Nazil</i> (perfect) = sent down, via <i>rasul</i> = prophets (the sent ones), inimitable (S.2:23, 10:37-38, 17:88); Bible is corrupted,	8) progressive & authoritative -General Revelation = nature -Special Revelation = prophets -Personified Revelation = Jesus Christ -Ongoing Revelation = Holy Spirit (Heb.1:1-2; Jn.14:16-26 ; 16:7-15)
9) Predestination:	9) <i>Insh=allah</i> (S.9:51; 16:93-95),no personal choice, destiny (<i>Kismet</i>)	9) foreknowledge (God woos, we respond), salvation = personal choice
10) Theocracy:	10) <i>Khilafa</i> , controlled by Caliph, <i>Ulema</i> , <i>Shari=ah</i> , <i>Jihad</i> = <i>Dar-al- Islam</i> ; states role to do <i>Da=wah</i> , apostasy = treason.	10) Sojourners, Kingdom of God in our hearts, controlled by Holy Spirit, Church/state separation, Christian culture secondary, mission to convict humanity (Matt.28:19-20)
11) Spirit World:	11) Dualistic: Folk Islam, <i>Jinns</i>	11) exists, controlled by Holy Spirit
12) Prayer:	12) Verbatim & memorized, one-way communication.	12) Communication with God, two-way, praise, request, responses
13) Paradise:	13) Garden = carnal delights, river of wine, houris (S.55:56; 56:35-36), Allah absent.	13) Eden revisited, God centred, relationship with God realised eternally.

MUHAMMAD
(A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC)
(Jay Smith)

INTRODUCTION

[I] IS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET?

[A] THE MUSLIM POSITION:

- [1] Supernatural witness points to Muhammad's Prophethood
- [2] Prophecy points to his Prophethood
- [3] Miracles point to his Prophethood
- [4] Illiterate Creator of the Qur'an points to his Prophethood

[B] THE CHRISTIAN POSITION:

- [1] Who Qualifies as a true Prophet of God?
 - (a) A Prophet must be born in the Prophetic Race
 - (b) A Prophet's Message must Conform to previous Revelation
 - (c) A Prophet's Predictions must be Verifiable
 - (d) A Prophet must Speak in the Name of God (=YAHWEH or JEHOVAH)
- [2] Which of these Biblical Qualifications does Muhammad Demonstrate?
 - (a) Was he born in the line of the Prophets?
 - (b) Did Muhammad's revelation conform to the message which had preceded him?
 - (c) Were any of Muhammad's predictions verifiable within his lifetime?
 - (d) Did he speak in the name of "the eternal," YAHWEH?

[II] QUESTIONS CONCERNING MUHAMMAD'S PROPHETHOOD.

[A] WAS MUHAMMAD A SPECIFIC OR UNIVERSAL PROPHET?

[B] WAS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET OF THE JEWS?

[C] WAS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET TO THE CHRISTIANS?

[D] WAS MUHAMMAD THE SEAL OF THE PROPHETS?

- [1] What about Jesus?
- [2] What about the Other Prophets?
- [3] What about Muhammad?
 - (a) Muhammad's Concessions to People:
 - (b) Muhammad's Sexuality:
 - (c) Muhammad's elevation:
 - (d) Muhammad's Sin:

[III] WERE THERE PROPHECIES CONCERNING MUHAMMAD?

[A] IS THERE A PREDICTION OF MUHAMMAD IN DEUTERONOMY 18?

- [1] Comparison: Who is the prophet like Moses?

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[2] Contrast: This prophet cannot be Muhammad

[3] Consideration: This prophet must be Jesus

[4] Conclusion: Without a prediction where is Muhammad's authority?.

[B] ARE THERE OTHER PREDICTIONS OF MUHAMMAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

[1] Do we find Muhammad in the Old Testament?

[2] Muslims find Muhammad in the Old Testament.

[3] Names which point to Muhammad

[4] Song of Solomon

[5] The Problem with this exercise

[C] IS THERE A PROPHECY OF MUHAMMAD IN THE INJIL?

[1] Parakletos or Periklytos?

[2] Greek language confirms parakletos.

[3] Greek manuscripts confirm parakletos

[4] Therefore Muhammad could not be the parakletos

[5] So who is the parakletos?

[6] The answer is the Holy Spirit, who arrived 50 days later

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION:

All of us have had discussions with Muslims concerning our different beliefs. If your experience has been like mine, in order to dialogue convincingly with a Muslim, you have had to bring up the thorny question concerning the foundation for his or her beliefs. And in order to speak to those foundations, you have had to speak to the issue concerning the founder (as far as the Muslim-world is concerned) for those beliefs.

According to Muslim Tradition (as opposed to historical and scientific evidence) Islam was created by Allah, but the final and truest revelations of Islam were "passed down" (**Nazil**) to humanity via the angel **Jibril** (Gabriel), to Muhammad. Muhammad, therefore is the final authority for Allah's revelation here on earth.

Consequently, if we are to dialogue with a Muslim it is imperative that we begin with the expounder for their beliefs, Muhammad. It is he who takes on the mantle of the "seal of the prophets," the final and greatest spokesman for God.

But where is the proof for such a title? How is he any different from any other man or thinker or statesman who came before; or after, for that matter? In Isaiah 41:21-23 we find a challenge to those who claim to come in the name of the Lord. Isaiah writes:

"Present your case," says the Lord. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. "Bring in your [proofs] to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them, and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know you are gods."

Like Isaiah in his day, we make the same challenge today, asking Muslims to provide us with proof for Muhammad's prophethood. Let us then see the case for their argument.

[II] IS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET?

Muslims point to not just one proof but to a number of areas, which they feel, substantiate their claim to Muhammad's prophethood. It would be helpful to look at these areas, and come to some conclusion as to whether they are legitimate claims for his prophethood.

[A] THE MUSLIM POSITION:

The name Muhammad, like Ahmed, means "the Praised One." It is more than likely that this was not his initial name, but was the name attributed to him later on in life once he became the recognized prophet to the Arabs. Scholars believe that his childhood name was "Amin," named after his mother "Amina" who died when he was 6 years old.

His father was called "Abdullah," but Muhammad never knew him as he died before he was born. After the death of his mother Muhammad was brought up by his grandfather, and following his death by his uncle, Abu Talib. In his youth Muhammad travelled widely with camel trading caravans. It is at this point, according to Muslim Tradition, that certain things happened to him which were indicators of his special status among men.

[1] A Supernatural Witness points to Muhammad's Prophethood

When he was three years old, two angels came and took out his heart from his chest, cleaned it with ice water, put it back and left. In doing so they supposedly prepared him for his mission on earth.

Another story which comes via Muslim Tradition mentions that after the death of his grandfather Abdu-Mutalib, Muhammad went to visit a Catholic monk with his uncle Abu-Talib. It is reported that the monk saw a cloud specifically protect Muhammad from the sun. It was then that he knew that he would be someone special.

At the age of twenty-five he married Khadijah, a widow fifteen years his senior, who was also his employer. The marriage was a happy one, and two boys and four girls were born to them, though the two boys did not live to a mature age. Khadija died after twenty-five years of marriage to Muhammad. During that time Muhammad never took another wife.

In 612 C.E. Muhammad became withdrawn and frequently went for meditation to Mt. Hira, which is situated close to Mecca. Here, according to tradition he had his first revelation.

In the Mishkat-ul-Massabih, vol.IV, pp.356-357 we read about this first revelation as reported by Aisha, Muhammad's favorite wife:

The first revelation which began to be revealed to the Apostle of Allah was a correct dream in sleep. He did not see a dream but it came like the morning dawn. Thereafter loneliness became dear to him and he used to seclude himself to the cave of Hira and engaged therein in deep devotion (and it is divine service) for many nights before he went to his house and provided himself with food therefor. Then he would return to Khadija and take provision for the like of them (nights) until the truth came unto him while he was in the cave of Hira. The angel appeared before him and said, "Read." He said, "I cannot read." He narrated: Then he took me and pressed me hard till there came great exhaustion on me; thereafter he let me off and said, "Read." I replied, "I cannot read." Then he took me and pressed me hard for the second time until there appeared a great exhaustion on me; thereafter he let me off. He said, "Read." I said, "I cannot read." Then he took me and pressed me a third time till there appeared a great exhaustion on me; thereafter he let me off. He said, "Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught with the pen, taught man what he knew not." Then the prophet returned therewith, his heart was trembling and he went to Khadijah and said, "Wrap me up, wrap me up." Then they wrapped him until the dread went away from him.

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Like anyone who had been grabbed by an angel (some traditions say he was grabbed by the throat), he became frightened and ran home to his wife, who had her own rather interesting means of delineating whether he was telling the truth or not. While seated herself, she had him sit on either leg where she asked him if he still saw the angel, to which he said yes. Then she disrobed in front of him and asked him again, and when he said no, she then believed he was receiving authentic revelations.

Khadija then took him to a Nestorian monk in Mecca, named Waraqa ibn Nofal (there are some traditions which say he was her cousin). He was in the process of translating the book of Matthew into Arabic at the time. He, upon questioning him, confirmed that Muhammad was indeed a prophet. Unfortunately this monk must not have translated Matthew 24:24 by this time. Had he done so, Muhammad may never have taken the route of prophethood.

These above accounts, according to Muslim Tradition, are how Muhammad obtained his authority to begin his ministry, and how he received credibility as a prophet of God, and more than that, as the ultimate prophet of God, the "seal of all the prophets" (according to Sura 33:40).

There are other alleged "proofs" which Muslims point to which substantiates his claim to prophethood:

[2] Prophecy points to his Prophethood

Another proof of his prophethood, according to Muslims, stems from the fact that Muhammad prophesied events in the future, which then came to pass later on. Only a prophet of God could know what was going to happen in the future, and therefore Muhammad must be a prophet. Yet, the only 'real' prophecy recorded, which Muslims attribute to Muhammad is that found in Sura 30:1-4, where it is written:

A.L.M. The Roman Empire has been defeated. In a land close by; but they (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious. Within a few years. With Allah is the decision, in the past and in the future: on that day shall the Believers rejoice.

This passage refers to the defeat of the Byzantines in Syria by the Persians under Khusran Parvis (in A.D. 615), six years before the **Hijra**.

The defeat of the Persians should take place soon- "in a small number of years." In light of this prediction, Abu-Bakr undertook a bet with Ubai-ibn-Khalaf that this prediction would be fulfilled within three years. But he was corrected by Muhammad, who stated that the "small number" is between three and nine years (Al-Baizawi).

Muslims tell us that the Byzantines overcame their enemies within seven years. However, the fact is that the Byzantines defeated Persia in AD 628 (Al-Baizawi's commentary). That was twelve years after the prediction of Muhammad. Consequently, this passage does not qualify as a prophecy, particularly as the time between the prophecy and fulfilment was far too short, and in addition the event was easily predictable. The odds were only 50/50.

The other 'prophecies' which Muslims point to refer to Muhammad's victories and those relating to the Qur'an itself. It is nearly impossible to establish whether these prophecies were said before their fulfilment. Besides, like the previous example, they were either easily predictable, or just war-propaganda. In this event George Bush might be called a prophet too, for he predicted that the Gulf-coalition would win the war with Iraq.

[3] Miracles point to his Prophethood

Muslims also claim that Muhammad performed miracles, and this is further proof that he was a prophet. Interestingly, despite this claim by Muslims, the Qur'an, whose authority they refer to, denies that Muhammad performed any miracles.

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Take for instance Sura 17:90-93. Here Muhammad is challenged to perform miracles to prove his credibility, and he responds by admitting that he is only a man, an apostle. There are other similar Suras which speak about the challenge for a sign by unbelievers, followed by Muhammad's angry retort that he was merely a "warner," a "guide," and a "bearer of glad tidings." (refer to Suras 2:118-119; 6:37 and 124; 13:7; and 17:59).

The Hadith, on the other hand, reports a number of miracles which Muslims are quick to point to as further proof for Muhammad's authority. In Mishkat IV page 411 we read:

The prophet was looking while riding upon his mule like one eagerly longing to kill them. He said: 'This was when the blood boiled in veins.' Thereafter he took some pebbles and threw them at the faces of the infidels and then said: 'Be routed, by the Lord Muhammad.'

And in Mishkat IV pages 419-420 we read:

Anas reported: A man wrote to the prophet that he turned an apostate from Islam and joined the infidels. The prophet said: 'Verily the earth will not accept him.' Abu Talhah informed me that he had come to the land wherein he died. He found him thrown outside. He said: 'What is the matter with him?' They said: 'They buried him several times but the earth did not accept him.'

But probably the most popular miracle which has been passed down by the hadith and fomented by Muslims even today, is the splitting of the moon by Muhammad. It is recorded in Sahih Muslim IV, pg.1467:

This hadith has been transmitted on the authority of 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud (who said): We were along with Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) at Mina that moon was split up into two. One of its parts was behind the mountain and the other one was on this side of the mountain. Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said to us: 'Bear witness to this.'

The splitting up of the moon is not simply a fable from the Hadith, but is alluded to in the Qur'an as well. Sura 54, which is titled "The Moon," begins by saying, "The hour (of judgment) is nigh, and the moon is cleft asunder..." From the context it is obvious that this was meant to be a sign, but people rejected it as such and in their desire to create some supernatural proof for their faith interpreted it word-for-word. Even today you will hear Muslims claim that the American astronauts, upon landing on the moon took pictures of a large crack, or fissure on the moon's surface, which is what remains from Muhammad's split.

These reports, for Christians, sound very much like the legendary stories of the New Testament Apocrypha. Though they are well-meaning reports, they are often very fanciful in character. However, they lack one simple ingredient: authenticity.

The Apocrypha primarily dates from the 2nd century C.E. (i.e. 70-170 years after the death of Jesus). The Hadith, on the other hand, was compiled approximately 250-300 years after the **Hijra**. Before that time all material and stories were passed down from generation to generation by oral tradition. Is it no wonder, then, that with each passing generation more was added to the story in order to enhance the image and character of the prophet?

[4] The Illiterate Creator of the Qur'an points to his Prophethood

Muslims claim that Muhammad was illiterate. They reason: "How can an illiterate man compose a book like the Qur'an?" By this they imply that the authorship for the Qur'an could not have been done by one who could not read, so consequently its composition is a miracle, since it must have come from Allah. They conclude, therefore, that the miracle of the Qur'an affords Muhammad the right to claim prophethood, and also answers the dilemma above concerning the need for a miracle to give him authority.

To better understand this argument, we need to refer to the passage which speaks of his illiteracy. In Sura 7:157 we read:

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*Those who follow the Apostle, the **unlettered prophet**, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures); in the Law and the Gospel; for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil: he allows them as lawful what is good.*

In order to understand what the words 'unlettered prophet' really mean, we have to take a look at the Arabic text. In the Arabic it says, **an-nabiyyal-ummi**. **Nabi** is easy to translate. It means prophet. That is pretty clear. The word '**ummi**,' however, is not so clear. To discern its meaning we need to refer to another verse in the Qur'an which uses it. We find it used in Sura 62:2, which says:

*It is He who has sent amongst the **Unlettered** an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom.*

Who are the 'unlettered' in this text? Yusuf Ali's commentary makes it quite clear who these unlettered are. He says in footnote no.5451, "The Unlettered; as applied to a people, **it refers to the Arabs**, in comparison with the People of the Book, who had a longer tradition of learning, but whose failure is referred to in verse 5 below. As applied to individuals, it means that Allah's Revelation is for the benefit of all men, whether they have worldly learning or not." The word **ummiyyun** used in Sura 62:2 is the plural form of **ummi** found in Sura 7:157. Therefore what we find is that the word **ummi** was used for people who did not have the scriptures, in contrast to the Jews and Christians. To put it simply, they were "unscriptured." Muhammad considered himself to be the prophet to the unscriptured, a prophet to those who had no Book, no revelation; in other words, to the Arabs. Therefore Sura 7:157 cannot be used as proof that Muhammad was illiterate.

What we can say is that more than likely Muhammad was literate. He was responsible for Khadija's caravans, had travelled widely, and must have kept records of his transactions.

The Hadith of Ibn Sa'd alludes to the fact that he wrote. Ibn Sa'd states,

The prophet, may Allah bless him, fell ill on Thursday. Thereupon he, i.e., Ibn 'Abbas began to weep and say: 'Woe be to this Thursday! What a Thursday.' The illness of the prophet, may Allah bless him, became severe: he said: 'Bring an ink-pot and something [paper or papyrus or any material used for writing] to write on. I shall [write for you] a document and you will never be misguided. (Ibn Sa'd, p.302)

This entire argument, however, is rather moot if one considers that the Qur'an which is in our possession today is not the original revelation which was revealed via Muhammad to his followers. In fact, according to tradition, it is the work of Muhammad's secretary Zaid ibn Thabit, who finally compiled it 14 years after Muhammad's death, during the reign of Uthman. Where, then, is the miracle in that?

From an historical perspective the argument falls even further into disrepute, as many historians believe that very little of the Qur'an was actually written by Muhammad, but was rather the result of an evolving set of polemical writings which became canonized in the 9th-10th century, 200-300 years after the life of Muhammad. Can we claim this a miracle?

The further one uncovers the facts, the further it becomes clear that the Qur'an is not the miracle which Muslims like to point to as proof for Muhammad's credibility as a prophet.

Can we, therefore, say that these four proofs put forward by the Muslims give validity to Muhammad's claim as a true prophet? I think not. Yet, according to Muslim Tradition these stories are all that are needed to give Muhammad the title "Rasu-ul-Allah."

I dare to differ. From our discussion above it is clear that the early supernatural witnesses are probably apocryphal additions from later Muslim Traditions, while the claim for Muhammad's illiteracy, though debatable, considering his background and vocation, misses the point entirely, since (according to the new research coming out of SOAS) the Qur'an was never written by him anyway. His claim of prophesying, furthermore, is as valid a claim as either you or I could give, considering he never went beyond a 50/50 odds. And the miracles attributed to him are so incredulous that they speak more to the times of the later tenth century polemical traditions than those of the seventh century Arabic isolation.

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Obviously the Muslims will need to come up with better defences than these for substantiating Muhammad's prophethood. Yet that is not all, for we as Christians are also interested in the question of prophethood. It is and always has been in our best interest to delineate who exactly is a true prophet, for we have been warned to be watchful for false prophets who will come our way (Matthew 24:24). Let's then look at some of the criteria which our scriptures give us for describing a true prophet.

[B] THE CHRISTIAN POSITION:

Let me begin by asking you a question. How would you define a prophet? Better yet, how would you know one if you saw him, or her? Would he or she be someone who is learned, perhaps wearing a beard (if a male), perhaps dressed in a white robe, and carrying a staff, with fiery eyes and booming voice, speaking with "thees" and "thous"? That is how Hollywood has portrayed a prophet. But is this the criteria God has given for a prophet? Is this the type of man God has chosen to represent Him on earth, to carry His message to the world?

What I would like to do now is try to answer the question of who, according to the scriptures, exactly qualifies to be called a prophet? Surely, if God had sent individuals to be His representatives on earth, He would have given us criteria by which we could recognize them, a means by which we could know who truly was His and who truly was not. Let's then go to the scriptures, His revelation to us, to find who God delineates as a true prophet.

[1] Who Qualifies as a true Prophet of God?

(Amos 3:7) Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.

Both Muslims and Christians would agree with this verse from Amos. God uses prophets to fulfill His purposes on earth. At times individuals are used to prophecy specific events (such as Miriam, Balaam, and Saul in the Old Testament, and Anna in the New Testament-Luke 2:36). The office of a prophet, however, is a specific task given to only certain chosen men. Many of us know the names of the more famous prophets, such as: Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Yahya (John the Baptist) and so on... Muslims would add to our list of prophets another name, that of Muhammad, whom they believe is the final and greatest of all prophets. According to the Qur'an, we read,

(Sura Al Ahzab 33:40) Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets.

Today we need to ask how it is that these men have come to have the office of prophet? What gives them the authority for calling themselves prophet? When we go to the scriptures we find that God delineated as qualifications for the office of prophet four categories:

- 1) A PROPHET MUST BE BORN IN THE PROPHETIC RACE,
- 2) HIS MESSAGE MUST CONFORM TO THE MESSAGE WHICH HAS GONE BEFORE,
- 4) THERE MUST BE VERIFIABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO THE PROPHET'S PREDICTIONS, AND

2) HE MUST SPEAK IN THE NAME OF GOD. Let's go through each of these four categories one-at-a-time.

(a) A PROPHET MUST BE BORN IN THE PROPHETIC RACE

To begin with, a prophet must be born within the line or race of the prophets. The Bible speaks specifically what this line is. In Genesis 12:1-3, we see that this refers to the family of Abraham (see also Galatians 3:8), and then carries on through his son Isaac (Genesis 17:2,7-8,15-21; 21:10-12; 22:2). The Qur'an, in Sura Al `Ankabut 29:27, also speaks specifically of this prophetic line, saying: "and we

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bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and We establish the Prophethood and the Scripture among his seed" (also Sura Al Jathiyah 45:16).

As we continue on in Genesis 25:23,31-33; 26:1-2 we find that the alliance passes to Jacob, who is subsequently named Israel (also Genesis 28:13-15; 32:28). Further on, in Genesis 49:1-4,8-10, this alliance passes on to Judah. In fact, as we continue throughout the Old Testament we find that God's work on earth runs uniquely through the line of Isaac and Jacob. It is their lineage alone that God uses for His work on earth. Even in the Deuteronomy 18 where Moses promises a prophet like unto him, it says specifically that the prophet would come "from among your own brothers," an Israelite of the line of Jacob.

Continuing this theme further we read in 2 Samuel 7:4-16 and Psalms 89:35-38 that God's alliance with humanity passes to David, and is finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ 1,000 years later (see Matthew 22:42).

Nowhere in any of those passages do we find any other line mentioned or acknowledged as being chosen for the office of prophethood.

(b) A PROPHET'S MESSAGE MUST CONFORM TO PREVIOUS REVELATION

A third qualification of a prophet concerns his message. A prophet's message, in order to be credible must conform to the revelation which God had revealed before. God's word must remain consistent, in other words unchanging, otherwise it becomes useless, a tool in the hands of corrupt rulers and would-be prophets, bending and swaying with the whim of succeeding generations.

The unchangeability of God's word is often repeated in the scriptures. In Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35; and Revelation 22:18-20 we find warnings not to change or delete God's Word. God's Word must remain constant. In Psalms 89:35 we read that God cannot contradict His word.

The Qur'an, as well, agrees with this directive in Suras Al An'am 6:34 and Yunus 10:64. In Sura Qaf 50:28-29 Allah is quoted as saying: "I had already in advance sent you warning; the Word changes not." In fact, the Qur'an claims that it was sent to guard the former revelations (Al Ma'idah 5:47-51). Thus, that which the prophets revealed cannot be contradictory. If it is, it must not be trusted.

There are, however, many Qur'anic stories which contradict the Biblical account (the revelation which came before). We don't have time to go into all of them here, but perhaps it would be helpful to just relate a few of the more relevant ones:

1) Many **contradictions are found concerning **Abraham**:**

- a) Abraham's father is wrongly called Azar, instead of Terah (Al An'am 6:74 vs. Genesis 11:26).
- b) He did not raise his descendants in the valley of Mecca, but in Hebron (Genesis 13:14-18).
- c) His hometown was not called Mecca but Ur in Chaldea. Even the secular-Ebla tablets found in Syria recently give proof for this (see Genesis 11:31).
- d) He wandered through Haran, not Arabia, and he went to Canaan, not to Mecca's valley. The Ebla tablets prove this as well (Genesis 11:31 & 12:5).
- e) He was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, and not Ishmael, as the Lord was to make His covenant with the Son brought about by His making, and not the son of the Egyptian slave, Hagar (see Genesis 17:18-21 & 22:2).
- f) There is no record that he and Ishmael went to Arabia and built the Ka'ba in Mecca, though he did spend some time in Egypt (Genesis 12:10).

2) Muslims assume that the **Arabs are **Ishmael's descendants**.**

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a) Yet, according to the best historical records, the first father of the Arabs was **Qahtan or Joktan**. Some of his sons names are still found in geographical locations in Arabia today, names such as Sheba, Hazarmaveth, Ophir, and Havilah.

b) Furthermore, Abraham's nephew **Lot** is another ancestor of the Arabs; as is Jacob's twin brother Esau, the father of the Edomites and the Moabites.

c) Finally, **Keturah**, Abraham's third wife, had six sons who all became forefathers of Arabs (i.e. Sheba and Dedan, located in Yemen)(Genesis 25).

3) Other errors are found in the Qur'an which contradict the Biblical account:

a) In the Qur'an **Mary** is recorded as the sister of **Aaron** and the daughter of **Imran**, as well as the mother of **Jesus** (Sura Maryam 19:28). Yet, the Mary of the Qur'an depicted as the mother of Jesus is 1,570 years removed from the Mary, the sister of Aaron (also referred to Miriam in the Bible).

b) Haman, which is not an Egyptian name but Babylonian, is mentioned as the **Wazir** of the Pharaoh in Suras 28:5; 29:38; 40:25,38, yet the book of Esther correctly lists him as an official of king Xerxes, in Babylon.

c) The Qur'an presents a confused and often contradictory view of the Holy Spirit. It is called God's own breath (15:29), the angel Gabriel (19:17), and the divine inspiration (16:2).

These are only some of the examples we could give, but they do point out that there are very real problems concerning the conformity of God's revelation relating to these two scriptures.

(c) A PROPHET'S PREDICTIONS MUST BE VERIFIABLE

The final qualification of a prophet deals with the veracity of the prophet's message, whether what he says can be verified. A prophet shows his authenticity by predicting events which can be verified by witnesses. Those predictions which cover the longest duration are the most relevant and valuable for us, and therefore we tend to focus on them. Yet, according to the principle which is announced in Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 43:9; and John 13:18-21, it is important that there are other predictions which are short-term, which can be verified by contemporaries of the prophet. These predictions serve to identify him immediately as a prophet, and so give credibility to the longer, future predictions.

When we take the example of Moses, we find that his prediction of the death and defeat of the Egyptian army was immediately fulfilled (Exodus 14:13-14,27-28). The same can be said of the prophet Isaiah, who prophesied that God would hold back the sun for ten steps (or hours) to permit Hezekiah to defeat his Assyrian enemy. It was fulfilled the same day (Isaiah 38:5-8). Another prophecy by Isaiah, concerning the rout of 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers came to pass the next morning (in Isaiah 37:21-38).

Imagine if you had been with Moses or Isaiah at the time these prophecies were fulfilled. How would you have felt? I'm sure your estimation for these two men would have increased dramatically. That was one of the reasons for these prophecies. It gave immediate credibility to him who was making the prophecy.

Someone could say that it is simple to predict a victory or defeat of an enemy; as one has a 50% chance of being correct. Therefore other predictions were required to substantiate the claim of the prophet, especially for later generations who did not have the ability to know the prophet first-hand. In Deuteronomy 28:1,15,64-66, and 30:1,4-5, Moses offers a prophecy concerning God's blessings and curses for the Children of Israel, depending on whether they obeyed or not. These curses were fulfilled far into the future, centuries later and consequently did not benefit those who initially heard the prophecy.

A prophecy by Isaiah to Hezekiah, concerning the captivity and enslavement of his descendants by the rulers of Babylon was fulfilled 150 years later, in 606 B.C. (Isaiah 39:6-7).

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Even the prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon was fulfilled 200 years later. In fact some believe its fulfilment continues on until today (read Isaiah 13:1,19-20).

Babylon was destroyed in 539 B.C., 200 years after the prophecy was made by Isaiah. Interestingly, however, up until now, 2,500 years later, no-one has ever tried to live there. The Arabs even refuse to stay overnight, yet they know nothing of this prediction since it does not exist in the Qur'an.

Finally we come to another prophecy which some believe is being fulfilled in our lifetime (see Isaiah 11:11-12). This prediction was given by Isaiah in 750 B.C., over 140 years before the first dispersion which occurred in 606 B.C. We know from historical records, and the scriptures that the first return was in 536 B.C. History also tells us that the second dispersion was in 70 C.E., while, according to some, the second return began towards the beginning of this century, in 1900, and continues till today.

These prophecies are especially helpful for us today, thousands of years later, as we, in hindsight can see the authenticity of Moses's and Isaiah's calling. Due to the fact that what they said so long ago has been fulfilled and are even now being fulfilled, what they say on other matters then takes on added credibility, because we know that they are truly men of God, who are being used by Him.

Since God's fingerprint can be evidenced in those fulfilled prophecies, His fingerprint can then be ascribed to the other claims which these men of God assert.

An interesting point needs to be interjected here; why were there so many verifications given by God for Isaiah? The reason must be that he has a unique place among all the prophets, because it is he who predicts, more than any other prophet:

- 1) the coming of Jesus (prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 & 9:6, and fulfilled in Matthew 1:22).
- 2) It is Isaiah who predicts Jesus's death (prophesied in Isaiah 35:4-5 & 53:1-12, and fulfilled in Luke 7:18-22, 24-27).
- 3) And finally, it is Isaiah who predicts Jesus's resurrection (prophesied in Isaiah 53:11, and fulfilled in Luke 18:33; 24:6-7).

There was no doubt that these were truly prophets of God, as they spoke of things which only God could have known, both immediately so that the people of their time could identify them as prophets, and in the long term so that we today can acknowledge the hand of God in their lives and ministry.

(d) A PROPHET MUST SPEAK IN THE NAME OF GOD

(=YAHWEH or JEHOVAH)

Secondly, a prophet of God must speak in the name of God, the unique name which He gave His creation to use. What exactly is that name? Traditionally it was known as the "Tetragrammaton" (YHWH). Today we spell it **Yahweh** or **Jehovah** depending on which vowels are used. This is the Hebrew name for God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (in Exodus 3), consisting of the four consonants YHWH. We don't know what vowels were used as it was never spoken audibly, due to the fact that it was regarded by the Jews as too sacred a name to be pronounced.

In Exodus 3:1-6, 13-15, where God talks to Moses at the burning bush, we find God referring to Himself as "I am" which in Hebrew means "**YAHWEH**," or in English **The One Who Is**. This is very significant. What God is saying here is that this name signifies His complete self-existence, that He has no dependence upon any other. Being self-existent, He cannot but be self-sufficient, and therefore, all-sufficient. No-one can claim to be self-existent but God, and thus no-one can claim this name. It is uniquely His.

God continues by saying that "this is my name for ever," signifying that it is His eternal name, the name which only God can take for Himself, and the name by which the Jews in Egypt would recognize Him (see also Ps.72:17-19 and Rev. 1:8,17).

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One can now see why the Jews in Palestine were so angry when Jesus made the same claim, calling Himself the "I am" in John 8:24,58. They naturally picked up stones to kill Him, as He had dared to take this name of God for Himself, and this was blasphemous, a sin which deserved the punishment of death by stoning.

Muslims are not familiar with the historical context of this name, nor the significance of its meaning, therefore they laugh when they hear Jesus referring to Himself as "I am" in John 8. It would be helpful to take them back to the Exodus 3 passage of the burning bush, since it is a story which exists in the Qur'an as well.

If we were to take a survey of the names for God found in the Bible and the Qur'an, we would find a rather interesting contrast. The General name for God in Hebrew is **Elohim**, which is mentioned 2,550 times. In Arabic it is **Allah**. The Descriptive name for God in Hebrew is **Adonai**, meaning Lord, and is mentioned only 340 times. In Arabic the equivalent is **Rabb**. But the Specific and Personal name for God in Hebrew, the name which God Himself asked Moses to use when referring to Him, is **Yahweh**, which means "the One who Is." This name is repeated **6,823** times in the Old Testament alone! Look it up for yourself.

(note: in our English translation, Yahweh can be identified easily. Every time the word "LORD" is capitalized, that signifies Yahweh). Thus all of the ancient Biblical prophets speak of God using this name. However, this name for God is not used even once in the Qur'an, and has no equivalent in the Arabic language, the language Muslims claim God speaks.

[2] Which of these Biblical Qualifications does Muhammad Demonstrate?

The question then must be asked: which of these four Biblical qualifications does Muhammad demonstrate? Was he born in the prophetic race, did he speak in the name of God, did his message conform to the message which had gone before, and was there any verifiable accomplishments to the prophet's predictions?

(a) Was he born in the line of the Prophets?

To begin with, we must ask the question whether he was born in the line of the prophets? Sura 29:27 mentions that prophethood and the scriptures came uniquely through the seed of Isaac and Jacob (Sura 45:16 concurs with Sura 29).

There are no Muslims, that I am aware of, who believe Muhammad was a descendant of Isaac. While there is an ongoing discussion concerning the veracity of the claim for Muhammad's descendance through Ishmael, this view is, nonetheless, widely held by Muslims today. Yet, this is a moot point, since according to both the Bible and the Qur'an, all the prophets came in the line of Isaac, fulfilling the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:20-21, that only through Isaac, and not Ishmael would the alliance with the Lord be fulfilled.

(b) Did Muhammad's revelation conform to the message which had preceded him?

Thirdly, did Muhammad's revelation conform to the message which had preceded him via the former prophets? We have seen that there are many contradictions between the Qur'an and the Bible, the most damaging of which concern who Jesus is, and the reason for His mission on earth.

Both the Bible and the Qur'an agree that God's word cannot change, and certainly must not contradict that which has gone before. Why then do we find all these contradictions?

If Muhammad is responsible for receiving these contradictory revelations from God, does it not put suspicion on his veracity as a true prophet? Certainly it does. If God had got the story right through the thousands of generations from Abraham to Jesus, with each successive prophet agreeing with and verifying that which had preceded him, then why all of a sudden did God get it so wrong less than 700 years later with the prophet Muhammad?

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Neither Muslims nor Christians would blame God for the contradictions. The blame must be placed on the messenger. Either all the previous prophets got it wrong, or the one who came at the end did. It beggars belief to think that for thousands of years the Jewish prophets were consistently revealing corrupted stories which all agreed in content, with not even once trying to correct the seeming errors; yet, finally, the last prophet got it right, and brought the message back to what God had intended all along. It reminds me of the mother, who watching her son in a parade whispers over to her friend, "Oh look, everyone's out of step but my Johnny boy!"

If a prophet's message goes against previous predictions, he then can no longer qualify as a true prophet.

(c) Were any of Muhammad's predictions verifiable within his lifetime?

redicted the victory of Islam in the battles which were fought in Arabia, there are no other precise predictions which we know of which demonstrate that his authority came from God (the victory of a battle has a 50-50 chance of being correct, or not). In fact, this was a cause for concern even for Muhammad, who, numerous times in the Qur'an mentions the distrust by others of his inability to produce a miraculous sign which would substantiate his authority (see Suras 10:21, 13:7 & 13:27).

(d) Did he speak in the name of "the eternal," YAHWEH?

Secondly, did Muhammad speak in the name of God, using that name which God gave as a signature for His authority, the name Yahweh? Though the term YHWH was used 6,823 times in the Bible, it is not used once in the Qur'an, and perhaps was not even known by Muhammad, since if he was supposedly illiterate in his own language, Arabic, it is hardly likely that he would have been able to read Hebrew.

Yet, is it not curious that Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets," he who was commissioned to bring the 'final revelation' did not even know the name of the God by whom he was commissioned? Is it not also curious that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Moses and David would go to the trouble of revealing His unique name in the Hebrew language, which was then passed down from generation to generation, up to the present day, yet somehow this name was forgotten or never revealed in the language which Muhammad claimed was God's special language, Arabic?

Moses could speak to the Israelites in Egypt with credibility because he spoke in the name of God. Why then did Muhammad presume that the descendants of those Israelites living in Medina would accept him as their prophet if he didn't even know the true name of God?

Would you accept my authority as a teacher of Christian apologetic, if I never once mentioned the name of God, nor even knew that the name existed? Of course not!

A prophet, by definition is one who comes with a message which is not his own (the Arabic word for prophet, **Rasul** means "the sent one"). Consequently, in order to give meaning to the message, there needs to be a sender, a person who created the message, whose signature goes along with the message to identify it as coming from Him. If I did not know who it was who sent me, my message would certainly lose its credibility. If I spoke as a Christian yet did not know the name of Jesus Christ, I would be a pretty miserable creature, and not worthy of my vocation.

In much the same way Muhammad's message completely loses its credibility since he was never even aware of the name of the sender, *Yahweh*, the One Who Is.

Consequently, if Muhammad did not even know the name of God, nor was God's true name even used in the language of Muhammad, then how could he claim to be truly from God?

There is little evidence from our scriptures which show that Muhammad had authority to claim prophethood. He was not born into the line of Jacob, nor did he speak in the name of Yahweh, nor did his revelations conform to the message which preceded him, and his predictions were not verifiable.

What, then, must be our conclusion? In Matthew 24:24-25 we read "...false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect...See I have told you ahead of time." In Deuteronomy 18:19-22 we find an even stronger warning:

If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

[III] QUESTIONS CONCERNING MUHAMMAD'S PROPHETHOOD

In this paper we have been asking the question of whether Muhammad could qualify as a true prophet of God. We posed the Muslim positions that he could: because of the supernatural witness to his prophethood during his early childhood, because of the fact that he delivered the Qur'an though he was illiterate, and because both his prophesies and miracles pointed to his prophethood.

After presenting rebuttals to all four of these positions we followed up with four criteria of our own, taken from scripture, to ascertain what God considers the qualities of the office of a prophet are. These were that he must be born in the prophetic race, that he must speak in the name of Yahweh, that his message must conform to previous revelations, and that his predictions must be verifiable. We concluded that Muhammad could not qualify in any four of these categories.

Now we take that same argument further, and ask some disturbing questions as to whether Muhammad could qualify to be a true prophet of God, not just for the Arabs, but for the world as a whole. We begin, then, with that very point. Was Muhammad called to be a prophet for the whole world, or was his calling only limited to that of Arabia?

[A] WAS MUHAMMAD A SPECIFIC OR UNIVERSAL PROPHET?

When we read the Qur'an we find that Muhammad understood himself at first to be a warner to Arabia in the succession of the Biblical prophets. It is evident from these passages in the Qur'an that he considered his duty was that of bringing the same message which can be found in the Bible, but now within the Arabic language. The Taurat was a book for the Jews, the Injil a book for the Christians, and now the Qur'an was a book for the Arabs. This was his initial understanding.

Let us look at some of the earlier suras which seem to point out that Muhammad's specific task was simply to warn, and at the same time reveal Allah's word in not just any language, but specifically the Arabic language:

Sura 2:119= *"Verily, We have sent thee in truth as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner: but of thee no question shall be asked of Companions of the Blazing Fire."*

Sura 14:4= *"We sent an apostle except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them."*

Sura 17:93= *"Say: 'Glory to my Lord! am I aught but a man, an Apostle?'"*

Sura 26:195,196= *"In the perspicuous Arabic tongue. Without doubt it is (announced) in the **mystic Books of former peoples**."*

Sura 27:91= *"For me, I have been commanded to serve the Lord of this City, Him Who has sanctified it and to Whom (belong) all things: and I am commanded to be of those who bow in Islam to Allah's Will,"*

Sura 42:7= *"Thus have We sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Qur'an: that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and all around her,"*

Sura 43:3= *"We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom)."*

Sura 46:12= *"And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy; and this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue: to admonish the unjust, and as Glad Tidings to those who do right."*

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As we continue on through the Qur'an we find that this position changes. He becomes not just a prophet for the Arabs, with simply an Arabic Qur'an, but enlarges on this idea to now become the universal and the final prophet for all people.

Sura 33:40= *"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets, and Allah has full knowledge of all things."*

Sura 34:28= *"We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not."*

While in Mecca, at least, where the former Suras quoted above were written, Muhammad considered himself as a warner to the Arab peoples. This position contradicts the claim by Muslims today that Muhammad was always a universal messenger for all peoples in all times.

The term "Arabic Qur'an" (in Suras 42:7; 43:3 and 46:12-above) seems to presuppose that there was at least one other Qur'an. This more than likely is referring to the Hebrew and possibly the Greek "Qur'an" (which are the Old and New Testament). Muslims would not say that they are invalidated by the Arabic Qur'an, but are rather confirmed by it.

There is a problem, however. An Arabic Qur'an was not announced in "the mystic books of the former peoples" (Sura 26:196). To say the least, there is no such book available today which speaks of this "Arabic Qur'an," in contrast to the former "Qur'ans." Neither was it known at the time of Muhammad, as we have many manuscripts in our possession with which to verify if such an announcement had been made.

So, initially Muhammad was only a messenger for the Arab people. He saw the polytheism which were pervasive in Arabia, and sought to eradicate it with the 'messages' he was receiving via the angel Gabriel.

Why then, did he go universal? There are those who believe this probably came about due to his successes on the battle-field. As his prominence grew, so did his authority over people who were not necessarily Arab. In other words, his supernatural monotheistic message, had to keep pace with the natural polytheistic reality on the ground. Suras 33:40 and 34:28 provided him with the authority to do so.

A more likely scenario is that the later redactors of the Qur'an imposed this universal application on Muhammad, once the borders of Islam had reached beyond the **Hijaz** (Arabia). Without eradicating the Suras which speak of his specific Arabic mission, they simply imposed this new category while applying the law of abrogation to the former Suras.

[B] WAS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET OF THE JEWS?

The second question we ask is whether Muhammad was a prophet to the Jews? In Medina were a number of Jewish groups called the **Kahinan**. They were the wealthiest inhabitants of Medina, and lived in fortified forts surrounding the city. There were three principle tribes living in Medina (according to Muslim Tradition): the **Kaynuka**, the **al-Nadir**, and the **Kurayza**. They all had good relations with the Jews of the north (especially in Khaybar).

During his first year in Medina Muhammad devoted considerable attention to the Jewish inhabitants there, describing himself as their prophet, who could be placed in the long line of prophets.

To appease them, he adopted many of their religious observances. Some of these were: 1) keeping the 10th of **Muharram** as a fast day, much like the Yom Kippur fast, 2) performing the 3-daily prayer rituals (versus the two **Salats** kept by Muhammad before the Hijra, while still in Mecca), 3) the weekly community worship services in the early afternoons on Fridays (following the Jewish Sabbath day of preparation). Note: this also made common-sense since Friday was the market day, the day when the

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largest number of people would have been in Medina. And finally, 4) Muhammad also adopted the north-facing **Qibla**, the practice of facing Jerusalem when praying.

It soon became clear, however, that the Jews in Medina were not going to accept Muhammad's claim to prophethood. These were for a number of reasons, which we can find in Sura 17:90-93. The Jews would not accept an Arabic speaking prophet. They had never accepted Jesus as a prophet, and he was an Aramaic speaking Jew! So why should they change now? Their principle requests, as we can derive from Sura 17, was that Muhammad present them with a few "superfluous" miracles.

In Sura 3:183 and 184 the Jews ask for a sign similar to that of Elijah for proof of his prophethood. Muhammad retorts that this has always been the way with previous prophets. In Suras 2:118-119; 6:37,124; 13:7; 17:59 the Jews also ask for a sign, to which Muhammad responds that even if a sign were given, like those of the earlier prophets, they would not believe it.

Since Muhammad did not proffer them with a sign, the Jews refused to accept him as their prophet. The opposition of the Jews of Medina to Muhammad appears to have had a significant impact on the shaping of Islam, for it was precisely at that time and apparently in direct response to the Jews' rejection of him that the nascent Muslim community took on a pronounced national character through the adoption of various elements from ancient Arabian worship. This occurred in the 2nd year of the **Hijra**, and was signaled by the change of direction for the **Qibla**. Instead of facing Jerusalem, the prayers were now to be carried out facing Mecca. Here we find a break with Muhammad's Jewish roots, and a symbolic statement that Islam was now venturing on an Arabic course.

This nationalization of Islam gave Muhammad a certain legitimacy and broadened his authority in the eyes of the Arab world. Instead of worshipping or adopting a foreign god, which had been the case for most of their pre-Islamic history, Muhammad could now offer a universally accepted god, who was uniquely adapted to the indigenous community. This not only elevated the status of the Arab people, whose allegiance Muhammad needed to continue his military campaigns, but it elevated the status of Muhammad as the mouthpiece of the true God. It also enhanced Muhammad's vision to introduce his heightened concept of god for the whole civilized world.

Muhammad stepped forward as the restorer of the religion of Abraham that had been distorted by the Jews and Christians. Abraham now became the great Hanif and not a Jew or a Christian. He now took the honour as the 'first Muslim,' "a person fully surrendered to the one true God," according to Suras 2:135; 3:67,95; 6:161; and 16:123.

Abraham and his son Ishmael, who the rest of the world regarded as having come from Ur of the Chaldeas, were now perceived to be the Arab's direct ancestors, and were now considered to have founded the Meccan sanctuary and the rites celebrated there.

Muhammad's task, therefore, was to restore the ancient rites to their original monotheistic state, as they had been corrupted by the intervening polytheists.

note: it is highly unlikely that Muhammad was acquainted with the idea of the connection between Abraham and the **Ka'ba** before the **Hijra** since this relationship occurs nowhere in the numerous Meccan passages that treat the significance of the **Ka'ba**. This apparent evolution in Muhammad's theology seems to have been created by his relationship with the Jews.

What then, of the Jews who remained under Muhammad's jurisdiction? They, needless to say, did not accept many of these new revelations concerning their own God. What was to be done with them? Let's see what Muslim Tradition tells us.

In 624 C.E., Muhammad routed a group of 900 Meccans with only a force of 300 at the battle of **Badr**. This battle became of the utmost significance for the history of Islam. Muhammad saw in the victory a powerful confirmation of his belief in the one true God (Suras 3:123; 8:17,65), and in his own call.

Word got around to the outlying areas of this defeat of the Meccans. Upon his return to Medina, Muhammad began to besiege the outlying Jewish tribe of the **Kaynuka** (Sura 59:14). Some say that he

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did so because they had not supported him when he decided to face the Meccans. The Jews were forced to abandon their fort and move north to other Jewish settlements leaving their possessions behind.

In 625 C.E., the Meccans sent a force of 3,000 and defeated Muhammad at the battle of **Uhud**, wounding Muhammad. But with his eloquence, he endeavored to raise the morale of his followers by exhortations and censure alike (Sura 3:118ff). His authority was inevitably hurt, and he took out much of his anger on the Jewish tribe of **Banu 'l-Nadir**. They could not withstand his wrath, and he banished them to Khaybar to the north, leaving behind their weapons, gold, and silver which was reserved for Muhammad alone (Sura 59:7ff).

In 627 C.E. Muhammad managed to keep an army of 10,000 Meccans at bay by building a trench around Medina (referred to as the "Battle of the Trench"). Once the frustrated Meccans finally left, Muhammad declared war on the last Jewish tribe in Medina, the **Kurayza**. Unlike the other Jewish families before them, they were given no clemency. According to Ibn Hisham, all the men, numbering between 600-900 were beheaded and their property was divided among the Muslims, while the women and children were taken as captives (for further reading, refer to Christians Ask Muslims by Gerhard Nehls).

The expulsion or elimination of these three Jewish tribes brought Muhammad closer to his goal of organizing an umma strictly on a religious basis. Many Muslims today contend that the Kurayza brought upon themselves their own destruction, as they were treacherous towards Muhammad and refused to accept his authority. According to the Qur'an, however, their only sin was that they "defied God and his messenger" (Sura 59:4). They were eliminated, it seems, simply because they remained neutral.

note: if we take the annihilation of the Kurayza tribe as a precedent, considering it was given authority by Muhammad himself, is it no wonder that so many non-Muslims in the world today shudder with apprehension at the thought of a Muslim domination of their state? Muslims will speak often of the rights of the non-believers within a Muslim Khilafa, yet, when observing the above examples, one wonders where those rights begin and the 'rights for self-expression' end? Is this why propagation of one's belief is illegal in many Muslim lands today? Will blasphemy also be prohibited, and punishable by death?

The question which we asked was whether Muhammad was a prophet of the Jews? We see that initially he attempted to be their prophet, incorporating many of their religious practices into those of his own. We would expect a prophet to do this.

They demanded that he prove his prophethood with signs. The Qur'an contends that these were of a miraculous nature. We have no way of knowing if this was all that they asked. It is likely that the Jews would have wanted to know whether his prophecies corroborated with those of their own.

It is obvious from the historical account, as well as the Qur'anic account that Muhammad was not able to provide either of the two, and consequently he was rejected by the Jews.

Instead of changing his beliefs, Muhammad decided to fight against the Jews. This we see vividly through his expulsions and executions of the three major tribes of Medina, using them as a scapegoat for the defeat of Uhud. What is more significant, however, is that all their riches were taken by himself and his followers. These were the wealthiest inhabitants of Medina, therefore, by taking their possessions they not only enriched Muhammad, but enhanced his image amongst the other Arabs.

Because of his actions, it is quite likely that Muhammad would not be acknowledged as a prophet of the Jews, both then in Medina, and currently today in the 20th century. It also now helps us to understand the great gulf which exists between Jews and Muslims currently.

[C] WAS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET TO THE CHRISTIANS?

We now come to the Christians. Was Muhammad a prophet to the Christians? Initially, according to Muslim Tradition, the Christians carried favour with Muhammad. We can see this attitude in Sura 5:82-86.

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In this passage Muhammad mentions that the Jews and pagans were the furthest from the believers, while the Christians were "the nearest among them in love..." This, according to Sura 5, was because they were men of learning who had renounced the world and were not arrogant (possibly referring to the Monks whom Muhammad had contact with earlier in his life). He goes on to say that when the Christians heard his message they accepted it with tears, and immediately counted themselves amongst the believers.

Obviously, we would have a problem with this definition of a Christian. What Muhammad is speaking of here are not Christians, as we know them, but individuals who have either conceded to him out of fear for their lives, or have converted out of Christianity and become Muslims. It would be difficult to believe that Christians could make such statements about their beliefs towards Muhammad and still call themselves Christian. These individuals have truly rejected their earlier faith.

The supposed affinity with Christians was, nonetheless, short-lived. The Qur'an gives the impression that there was a gradual deterioration in the Muslims relationship towards the Christians, in Sura 57:27. Those who followed Jesus the son of Mary had been called on "to seek for the Good pleasure of Allah," but, according to this Sura, they soon became rebellious transgressors.

If we were to read other Suras which pertained to Jews and Christians, it soon becomes evident that both the Jews and Christians were considered little more than enemies of the unbelievers. They were only acceptable to Muhammad once they had acknowledged him as a prophet (Sura 5:86). In fact there are specific Suras which warn the believers not to acquaint themselves with the Christians and Jews, warning that the Christians are only interested in converting the believers to their own beliefs. Consider these:

Sura 2:120= *"Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: 'The Guidance of Allah, that is the (only) Guidance.' Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor Helper against Allah."*

Sura 3:28= *"Let not the Believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers rather than believers; if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah; except by way of precaution, that ye may guard yourselves from them. But Allah cautions you (to remember) Himself; for the final goal is to Allah."*

Sura 5:54= *"O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust."*

With quotes like the above, is it possible for us to contend that Muhammad was the prophet of the Christians? It is highly doubtful. It seems that Muhammad, and those who follow him can only accept Jews and Christians if they first renounce their beliefs and follow Muhammad as the final prophet. This is not an accommodation at all but rather a threat, and finally a denunciation of all that the Jews and Christians cherish dearly.

[D] WAS MUHAMMAD THE SEAL OF THE PROPHETS?:

We now come to the question of whether Muhammad had the right to claim to be the greatest of all the prophets, the final revelation of God, by whom all other prophets were to be measured.

For most Christians the very question is sparked with controversy, as it assumes that Muhammad can be deemed a legitimate prophet. There are few Christians who would make this claim. For argument's sake, however, let's assume that Muhammad did have the right to claim prophethood. Could he be the seal of the prophets; that is the greatest of all the prophets? Does he have the character to make such a claim?

The Qur'an is very clear that he does. In **Sura 33:40** we read, "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the **Seal of the Prophets**, and Allah has full knowledge of all things."

[1] What about Jesus?

How, as Christians are we to answer that claim? What the Qur'an is saying, in essence, is that Muhammad has a standing with God which is superior to that of even Jesus. We know that the Qur'an does not attribute divinity to Jesus, but considers him merely as a prophet. Yet, in the pages of both the Qur'an and the Bible Jesus enjoys a uniqueness that elevates Him above all other prophets. The Qur'an is replete with attributes of Jesus which are absent in all other prophets:

- 1) He was born of a virgin (Suras 19:16-34; 21:91)
- 2) He was uniquely holy, pure or faultless, according to Sura 19:19.

(**note:** in Yusuf Ali's translation Jesus is referred to as "holy;" in Arberry's translation He is referred to as "pure," and in Pickthall's He is referred to as "faultless").

[2] What about the other Prophets?

Contrast this claim with the examples of the other prophets. We know that in the Bible all of the prophets were weak and sinful. Not one could stand up to the same standard which Jesus fulfilled. The Qur'an also recounts many sins of the prophets. Note the following:

Adam: in Sura 20:119 disobeyed his Lord and so sinned. In Sura 2:33 we find that Adam violated the prohibition to refrain from eating of the tree. The blame according to the following verse (34) is placed on Satan, but nonetheless Adam is charged with the sin. Then finally, in Sura 7:23 Adam and Eve ask for forgiveness for their wrongdoing.

Noah: in Sura 71:24-28 we find Noah cursing the infidels, asking God to annihilate them all, and then asks for forgiveness for his request. Noah in Sura 11:47-49 requests that God forgive his illegitimate son Canaan, and is rebuked by God for requesting it, implying a reprimand and threat to Noah. Noah's subsequent request for pardon is proof of his guilt.

Abraham: is ascribed a number of sins in the Qur'an, such as idolatry (Sura 6:77), doubting (2:263), deceit (Sura 37:39), and divination (Sura 37:86). These Suras show that Abraham worshiped the planets, questioned the might of God, lied several times, and consulted the stars.

Lot: is charged with failing to rely upon the Lord in Sura 22:82, when the people of Sodom refused the gift of his two daughters instead of the angels.

Aaron: is charged with going-along with the Israelites in building the golden calf, and therefore having done evil in Moses's absence (Suras 7:146-151 and 20:86-96).

Moses: was charged with ordering two golden cherubim to be fashioned in Sura 2:248. He is charged with murder, and the need for forgiveness in Sura 28:14-15. He allows sorcerers to practice their magic in Sura 26:42, and He asks forgiveness from God for his anger in Sura 7:147-150.

David: asks forgiveness from the Lord for his sin (which alludes to his taking of Uriah's wife, Bathsheba) in Sura 38:20-24.

Solomon: asks for forgiveness for letting horses cloud out his devotion to his Lord in Sura 38:30-34.

We can therefore say that even the Qur'an shows categorically that the prophets have all sinned, proving that, unlike Jesus, they were fallible. It is true that we have to look hard to find these sins (i.e, the Qur'an only alludes to David's sin, rather than emphatically pronouncing what the sin was in Sura 38), but the Qur'anic accounts do admit that God's holy emissaries were less than perfect. Jesus alone stands apart as "faultless."

(**Note:** it is important to remember that their sins are all in the realm of personal weaknesses, while their infallibility comes about when conveying divine revelations. In such instances they make no

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mistakes. It is this factor which seems to confuse so many Muslims, possibly because of their view of Nazil revelation attributed to the Qur'an.)

Jesus is the only one who is both infallible during his life, and when conveying divine revelations. There is no recorded evidence in the Bible or the Qur'an of Jesus sinning, both privately or publicly.

[3] What about Muhammad?

But what about Muhammad? If he is the Seal of the prophets, he should have a better record than those which are mentioned above. As the greatest of all prophets his life should be exemplary. But is it? Let's find out:

(a) *Muhammad's Concessions to People:*

God sent His prophets to nations which committed many sins. Although these prophets were also sinners, they never compromised with those to whom they were sent. Prophets like Elijah and Micah, though they were faced with formidable odds (i.e. 400 false prophets, their king and people) they never shifted from their position, nor did any seek to present a message to satisfy the expectations of their audience.

Muhammad was altogether different. Ibn Abbas broke with the restriction of having sex with his wife when he first awoke, which was a law instigated by Muhammad, and therefore, asked forgiveness from Muhammad, who, receiving Sura 2:183 suddenly allows men to now do that which before was prohibited.

Muhammad legalized **Muta** marriages (marriages of pleasure) for his followers during the battle of Khaybar and Fath (Al-Bukhari's "al-Jami' al-Sahih, pg.423). He then prohibits it during the battle of Wadaa, because he believed it now resembled fornication (Imam Muslim's "al-Jami' al-Sahih" pg.130-131).

The Satanic Verses found in Sura 53:19-20 which speak about the goddesses **Allat, Manat and Al Uzza** were recognized by Muhammad during a dispiriting time in Mecca. When he mentioned them, the Meccans rejoiced and joined him in prayer. Then, supposedly Gabriel told him later to change this revelation.

(b) *Muhammad's Sexuality:*

The sexuality of Muhammad is a rather contentious area for most Muslims who believe that the sexual rules practised by Muhammad and his followers were simply a fact of those days in which he lived, and we must see him within that context.

The argument by Muslims is that during the "Holy Wars" when many men were killed, polygamy, for instance, was a justifiable provision for the widows. Yet, according to notes in "Sahih Muslim" III, pg.941, in all the 82 hostilities during the lifetime of Muhammad, only 259 Muslims lost their lives. Muhammad moved to Mecca with 10,000 men. How many of them would have had a chance of marrying even one widow? 2%! (current figures show an over-abundance of males due to amnio-centesis tests, because of the girls who are aborted as a result of the findings: i.e. 20 million extra boys in China)

So what must we say about **Polygamy?**:

We are reminded of the words of Jesus who said, "He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Luke 16:18).

Because polygamy excludes devoted love, for love between the sexes is exclusive, it is degraded in essence to mere sexual fulfilment. No woman who loves her husband and wishes to be fully loved in return, can tolerate a partner (why else was Hafsa so upset with Muhammad when he took the Copt Mary to her bed?).

Take for instance a report from Aisha, Muhammad's favourite wife (recorded in Mishkat 1, pg.210, and noted in the Hadiths collected by al-Bukhari and Muslim). This report quotes her as saying: "I used to backbite those (females) who offered themselves for the Messenger of Allah. So I asked: Does a

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woman offer herself? Then the Almighty Allah revealed: you (Muhammad) may put off whom you please of them, you may take to you whom you wish, and if you desire any whom you have separated, no blame attaches to you (from Sura 33:51). It seems to me that your Lord hastens to satisfy your desire."

There is a further aspect: monogamy gives recognition, status and integrity to a woman. It is simplistic to argue that a polygamous society makes prostitution unnecessary. What about sexual fulfilment for the woman who has to share her husband with other wives? And what about the men who surely have to go without wives, because someone else (usually an older and thus richer man) has more than one?

When we look at the life of Muhammad we find an even larger emphasis on sex, and the fulfilment of carnal desires. Consider the following examples:

(1) **13 Wives:** A Muslim man is permitted to marry up to four wives (excluding concubines) according to Sura 4:3. Muhammad had lived 25 years married to his first wife Khadija. After her death, which roughly coincided with the Hijra to Medina, he married about thirteen wives (the exact number is still debated). All except Aisha were widows or divorcees.

It is recorded in Sura 33:50, "O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers, and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee; and daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts, and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with thee; and any believing woman, who dedicates her soul to the Prophet, and if the Prophet wishes to wed her-this only for thee, and not for the believers (at large)..."

This Sura gives Muhammad an unlimited number of women who lived in and around him, yet set strict restrictions on the other believers.

(2) **Zainab:** was the wife of his adopted son Zaid. When Zaid realized that Muhammad wanted her he divorced her so that Muhammad could have her. Sura 33:36-38 speaks of this affair (read).

(3) **Preference:** In Sura 33:51 we read, "Thou mayest put off whom thou wilt of them, and whom thou wilt thou mayest take to thee; and if thou seekest any thou hast set aside there is no fault in thee. So it is likelier they will be comforted, and not sorrow, and every one of them will be well-pleased with what thou givest her."

According to Al-Hasan, this phrase means "that the Lord (may He be praised and exalted) allowed Muhammad to abandon or to sleep with any of his women, according to his wish." Muhammad bestowed his love on Aisha, Hafsa, Um Salama and Zainab constantly and equally, and deferred the turn of five of his women (Ummu Habiba, Maymuna, Sawda, Juwayrid, and Safiyya). These he would visit according to whim (al-Zamakhshari's commentary on the verse).

(4) **Mary:** According to tradition, Muhammad would take a rota with his wives, sleeping with each in their turn. One night, during Hafsa's turn, she asked to visit her father, and Muhammad granted her request. While she was gone, however, Muhammad took Mary the Coptic slave-girl and slept with her in Hafsa's bed. Hafsa returned, was enraged, and confronted Muhammad. He promised (on oath) not to touch Mary again if she would keep this a secret, and then promised that her father Umar would be his successor after Abu Bakr (according to al-Sira al-Halabiyya, vol.2).

Hafsah, however, told Aisha of the incident, and for a full month Muhammad had no dealings with any of his wives, living with Mary alone. Aisha berated Muhammad for his deceit, whereupon Muhammad was finally given the vision recorded in Sura 66:1, in order to defend himself (Mizanu'l Haqq, pg.330 and Mishkat II, pgs.680-681) (read Ali's version of 66:1, plus footnotes).

This Sura says, "O prophet, why forbiddest thou what God has made lawful to thee, seeking the good pleasure of thy wives...?" Based on this ayah it seems that God is in the business of not only getting Muhammad out of his 'jams', but that God justifies unfaithfulness and deceit as well.

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(5) **Aisha:** According to Sahih Muslim (pg.716) Aisha reported that Muhammad married her when she was seven years old, and she was taken to his house as a bride when she was nine, along with her dolls. When Muhammad died she was only eighteen.

(6) **Zealousness:** There are many accounts of Muhammad's prowess with women. The traditions maintain that his marriages were primarily an act of compassion towards the widows whom he married. The evidence seems to say differently.

According to Al-Bukhari (1 pg.165) "the prophet used to visit all his wives in a round, during the day and night and they were eleven in number. I asked Anas, 'Had the prophet the strength for it?' Anas replied, 'We used to say that the prophet was given the strength of thirty (men). And Sa'id said on the authority of Qatada that Anas had told him about nine wives only (not eleven)."

Ibn Sa'd backs this up as well where he states (1 pg.438) "The apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: Gabriel brought a kettle from which I ate and I was given the power of sexual intercourse [equal] to forty men."

It is odd that God would allow one of His prophets, the recipient of revelations, to indulge in lust and revel with women at his pleasure. Muhammad embraced those who captivated his mind and heart with their beauty, such as Aisha and Zainab, and treated the rest poorly.

Outside of Solomon (who many do not consider to be a prophet), do we find any of the other prophets so obviously controlled by sex, or even engaged in this sort of lifestyle? Of course not! We would be appalled if a prophet would allow his carnal desires to so completely control him that he would even use the Word of God to escape from difficult circumstances (such as we noted with Zainab or the incident with Hafsa and Aisha).

(c) Muhammad's elevation:

Looking at the "revelations" of the Qur'an and the Hadith Traditions, we cannot fail to see that a number of statements deal with personal advantages and give Muhammad a particular status which is far beyond any other prophet's.

We are told that all believers were to follow his example. Malek-b-Anas reported a defective tradition where Muhammad is purported to say, "I leave with you two things; as long as you hold fast by them both, you will never be misguided; the book of Allah and the Sunnah of his messenger (the copying of the lifestyle of Muhammad)" (from Mishkat 1, pg.159)

Abu Hu'airah reported that the messenger of Allah said, "Every one of my followers will enter Paradise except he who refused." He was questioned, "And who has refused (truth)?" He said, "Whoever obeys me shall enter paradise, and whoever disobeys me has refused" (from Mishkat 1, Pg.173). Now not only must we obey God, but it is requisite that we obey Muhammad in order to enter paradise!

The Qur'an also assumes a high regard for Muhammad as the supreme example in Sura 33:21, saying, "Ye have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern of (conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah." Later, in ayya 36 a reprimand is given for any who question the prophet's authority, equating his authority with that of Allah, "It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Apostle, to have any option about their decision. If anyone disobeys Allah and His Apostle, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path."

(d) Muhammad's Sin:

Our final category asks whether Muhammad, unlike Jesus (Sura 19:19), ever sinned. Can the same be said of Muhammad that was said of Jesus? I believe not!

The Qur'an admits that the sins of Muhammad were many and that they weighed heavily on him. Sura 94:1-3 speaks of this when it says: "Have We not expanded thee thy breast? And removed from thee thy burden, that which did gall thy back?" These verses indicate that Allah had to remove Muhammad's burdens (sins?) from his back. Muslims contend that these burdens were committed before he became a prophet (before 610). We need only refer to Sura 48:2 which says in reference to Muhammad, "Allah may

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forgive thee thy faults of the past and those to follow..." indicating that even after the Sura was delivered Allah expected him to sin.

In Suras 40:55 and Sura 47:19 we find written, "...and ask forgiveness for thy fault..." This seems straightforward, until you read Yusuf Ali's note at the bottom (4428), which explains that due to the prophet's responsibilities he asks forgiveness in a **representative** capacity. Leaving Yusuf Ali's "eisegesis" aside it seems evident that Muhammad, a weak and sinful man, pales in comparison to Jesus, the sinless and perfect incarnate God Himself.

As an outside observer, we find it incredulous that Muhammad is permitted to live outside of the very rules which he has ordained for the believers (i.e. permitted to marry more than four wives, or permitted to marry the wife of his adopted son, or permitted to consummate a marriage to a girl of only nine).

Yet, according to Islam, he is, at the same time, the absolute example of which all believers are to model. One is left with a set of contradictions: How are we to follow the model of a prophet who himself abrogates the very parameters which he has set for us to live by? To follow his example would contravene his laws. If a person is asked to follow a certain leader, they would weigh up the 'pros and cons' before reaching a decision. But when truth and eternal life are involved, expediency on temporal issues no longer applies. So when we are told to follow in the footsteps of a spiritual leader, our confidence must not be emotional alone; our confidence must be rational.

That presupposes as deep a study of the quality of the life of the example as possible. One should not give a deaf ear to negative reports, provided they are substantiated. Also one should not explain away possible flaws. But most of all one must have a fixed standard by which to measure right and wrong, good and evil. As Christians we use the standard that is found in the Bible. Ultimately, our concept of what is moral and what is immoral will find its root there.

We are deeply interested in the question of true prophethood. It is and always has been in our best interest to delineate who exactly is a true prophet, for we have been warned to be watchful for false prophets who will come our way (Matthew 24:24).

In light of that we ask whether Muhammad follows the standards by which he has set for himself; and we find him to be wanting. The historical record shows us that he abrogated his call to the Jews when he exiled them from Medina and executed the males of the Kurayza tribe. His claim to be the Seal of the prophets rings hollow in light of his carnal inadequacies, especially in comparison with the other prophets who preceded him.

Finally we ask whether Muhammad fits the pattern of a prophet which we find in our own scriptures. That is the true test for us as Christians. From our study it is easy to ascertain that Muhammad failed in this category as well. What remains is to deal with one last area, the claim by Muslims that Muhammad was promised by the prophets who preceded him, and that these prophecies can be found in their writings. It is that area which we will take up next in order to conclude this study.

[III] WERE THERE PROPHECIES CONCERNING MUHAMMAD?

We now come to this third and final category in our paper where we ask the question of whether the former prophets ever spoke about Muhammad? To begin with, let's ask that question of Moses, and see whether Muhammad is spoken of in the Taurat?

Let's begin with a hypothetical situation. For instance, what would you say if I were to stand up and claim that I was the final prophet, in a long line of prophets; that whatever I said came straight from God, and therefore was to be believed as authoritative? You would obviously question my credentials as a spokesman from God; as a prophet. With a name like Joseph Smith, the same name as the founder of Mormonism, I wouldn't be the first to make this claim. And like him, all I would have to do is write a book which prescribed a new way of life, a new revelation for humanity, and then look around for some disciples who would believe me willingly.

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There is another prophet who made such a claim, one who came a few hundred years before my namesake; you all know him as Muhammad, born in 570 C.E.

At the onset he received visions via the angel Gabriel in the Hira cave, outside Mecca, when he was 40 years old. Interestingly, it was his Nestorian Christian uncle who first told him that his visions were authoritative. Yet initially there were few people who took him seriously, or believed in him as a prophet. In fact, when he finally fled to Medina 8 years later, in 622 C.E. (known as the **Hijra**), he had less than 100 followers with him (not even a good-sized church by today's standards).

It was only when he attained political power, which afforded him economical might and control, that he was taken seriously, from a religious standpoint. This was especially so following the battle of Badr, when he turned against the Jews in Medina, with whom he had earlier made security alliances.

One might say, then, that his religious credibility was in direct proportion to his political ascendancy, culminating in his triumphal entry into Mecca 8 years later, after which a true theocracy was instilled, which by its very nature neutralized any criticism or suspicion of his religious credibility.

Because of his power-base in Medina and Mecca, Muhammad's authority was in no doubt 1,400 years ago, but it is in doubt today. There are many who are now asking where exactly Muhammad received his authority as a prophet? Previous prophets were authoritative first of all because they belonged to the line of prophets (the Israelite tribe), and secondly, because what they revealed coincided with that which had been revealed before; and indeed, continued the same theme, which was: the promise of a Messiah who would come to save the world from sin, and thereby bring God's children back in relationship with Him.

Yet, when we look at the revelations which Muhammad gave the world, we find many contradictions with the scriptures which preceded him. Some of the more common ones you know quite well: 1) the claim that **Ishmael** instead of Isaac was the son who was to be sacrificed by Abraham, and the two of them then building the **Ka'ba** in Mecca; 2) the erroneous burial account of Abel by Cain; 3) the rather humorous account of king **Solomon** meeting the queen of **Sheba** by talking to a Hoopoo bird; 4) the miraculous **birth of Jesus**, which according to the Qur'an took place under a **palm** tree, 5) and even the story of Jesus **speaking** as a baby, 6) and later breathing life into **birds of clay**. But probably the most damaging contradictions in the Qur'an is 7) its refusal to accept not only the doctrine of the **Trinity**, but to reject the **divinity** of Jesus as well as his **crucifixion** and **resurrection**. These are absolutely central to the Biblical testimony.

Because so much of that which is important is at a variance with that which came before one has to ask for proof of his authority in making such claims. And this is being done today. It is for this reason that Muslims are attempting to come up with a ready defence.

Initially, Muslims held the view that the differences between the Bible and the Qur'an could be blamed on the Jews and Christians, who, they believed, conspired to corrupt their scriptures in order to reject the claims of the prophet of Islam. One must ask how the Jews and Christians would have known what to change considering they would have had to do their work hundreds of years before the arrival of the Qur'an, as we have thousands of manuscripts which predate the Qur'an in our possession today, all of which remain true to the scripture which we "hold in our hands."

The Qur'an itself, in Suras 5:47-51, 6:34, and 10:64 say that God cannot change his word, and that the Qur'an was sent to guard the former revelations. Thus many Muslim scholars have been forced to deny the possibility of corruption in the Word of God contained in the Bible. Consequently, they have turned their endeavours in other directions, looking for predictions of Muhammad within those preceding scriptures. And it is this assertion which concerns us here.

The Muslim agenda

Muslims will point out that in the Qur'an there are two ayas (verses) which speak of a prediction of Muhammad in the Taurat and the Injil (the Torah and the Gospels). They are:

Sura 7:157= "Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Taurat and the Injil..."

Sura 61:6= "Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Taurat, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is Ahmad (the Praised One)."

These two ayas say specifically that Muhammad was referred to in both the Taurat and the Injil (the Torah and the Gospel). Our concern here is to ascertain whether this is true, whether there are any predictions concerning Muhammad outside the Qur'an?

In other words, we are interested in finding out whether there is any evidence that the previous Jewish and Christian scriptures spoke about his coming?

Most Muslims believe that in the Taurat (specifically in Deuteronomy 18:18) there is reference to the prophecy which the Qur'an speaks of in Sura 7:157 and Sura 61:6 concerning Muhammad. So it is to that passage that we will first focus our enquiry.

[A] IS THERE A PREDICTION OF MUHAMMAD IN DEUTERONOMY 18?

In Deuteronomy 18:18 we read:

"I (the LORD) will raise up for them a Prophet like you (Moses) and he will tell them everything I command him."

[1] Comparison: Who is the prophet like Moses?

Our inquiry here is to ascertain what evidence supports the Muslim claim that it is Muhammad who is "a Prophet like you [Moses]." Is it he who is referred to in these verses? If it is then this would contradict the claim by Christians that the verse refers to the prophet Jesus, the promised Messiah.

In order to support their claim, Muslim apologists have tried to write a list of criteria pertaining to Moses and Muhammad, saying that: both were married and had children, both led battles, and both were leaders, etc... What they fail to take into consideration is that any prophet could claim many of these parallels for himself.

A handier tool would be to identify those comparisons which Moses fulfilled which are unique to his ministry, and which would, therefore, be unique to him who is: "a prophet like you (Moses)." In other words, compare apples with apples.

[2] Contrast: This prophet cannot be Muhammad

Can we, therefore, say that Muhammad is the promised one, this "prophet like Moses?" From what we have just read, we find that Muhammad was not born in the prophetic line of Moses, had no personal relationship with God, nor was he established in authority by God, as were both Moses and Jesus.

More importantly, the mission of Muhammad was nothing like that of Moses and Jesus, for it was Moses and Jesus who offered themselves as a sacrifice for the sins of their people (Exodus 32:30-32; Deuteronomy 34:10-12; and Matthew 26:28).

Most significantly, however, is the fact that, beginning with Moses and concluding with Jesus, the means of forgiveness and reconciliation with God were brought about (Leviticus 4:2; 6:24,25; 14:13 and Hebrew 19:22). This is the real criteria for "a prophet who is like you (Moses)." Many prophets can claim to be like Moses from the standpoint of human reasoning. Only one can claim to be like Moses from the standpoint of God's reasoning. His desire to save mankind, which Moses first began by bringing the Children of Israel out of captivity from Egypt, and which Jesus finally accomplished by bringing all believers out of captivity from sin 2,000 years ago.

[3] Consideration: This prophet must be Jesus:

Muhammad can never claim to parallel the essential and unique aspects of Moses' ministry on earth, as Jesus can. Those who worked alongside Jesus, and who predated Muhammad by nearly 700 years came to this same conclusion. Consider the following witnesses from John and Luke:

John 1:45 *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law."*

John 5:46 *"If you believed Moses you would believe me [Jesus], for he wrote about me."*

John 6:14 *"Surely this [Jesus] is the prophet who is to come into the World."*

Acts 3:22 *"For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people...'"* (i.e. own brothers=sons of Israel.)

[4] Conclusion: Without a prediction where is Muhammad's authority? In order to prove that Muhammad was a true prophet, the Qur'an stipulated that in the Taurat and the Injil predictions concerning him could be found (Refer to Suras 7:157 and 61:6 above). Yet we find none of these prophecies in either the Taurat, or the Injil (i.e. John 16:7 which we will deal with later). What does this say for the authority of Muhammad?

At the heart of the argument, for a Muslim, is the desire to find any external predictions for the coming of Muhammad in the Taurat and the Injil (as referred to in Sura 7:157). Without it, the only criteria for Muhammad's authority is the Qur'an; while the only authority for the Qur'an is Muhammad. This is circular reasoning, which is not a valid scholarly argument. Since the evidence for any prediction by Moses concerning Muhammad does not exist in the Taurat, this creates a problem for Muslims who must produce external criteria for the authenticity of their prophet.

Without it, Muhammad has no outside evidence to prove his prophethood. Furthermore, the Qur'an itself claims, in Sura 29:27, that prophethood belongs solely to the line of Isaac and Jacob, to which Muhammad has no part.

Consequently, the authority for the beliefs of over one billion Muslims then hangs on the single testimony of one finite man. (**note:** a man who himself admits his lack of power in Sura [Ta Ha] 20:49, and his sinfulness in Sura [Ghafir] 40:55, in contrast with the claim by Jesus to have all power in Matthew 28:18, and to be without sin in I Peter 2:22, which we also find in Sura 19:19).

As we read these verses and consider what has been written, it is easy to conclude that this prophecy by Moses in Deuteronomy 18 can only belong to Jesus the Christ. It is He who was born in the line of Moses, and it is He who had a relationship with God, as He was God. It was He who was established in authority with God, and it was He who, like Moses, offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of others (in His case for all of humanity). It is this last criteria which sets these two off from the rest. Only Moses and Jesus had the unique mission: to bring about a renewal of relationship with God; the one, Moses, out of the captivity of slavery in Egypt, and the other, Jesus, out of the captivity of sin in our hearts, for eternity.

[B] ARE THERE OTHER PREDICTIONS OF MUHAMMAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

We now come to the question of whether there are any other predictions of Muhammad in the Old Testament? According to Muslims there are a number of other instances where their prophet can be found. We need to know how to answer them on these issues as well.

[1] Do we find Muhammad in the Old Testament?

We know that Suras 7 and 61 maintain that Muhammad is supposedly predicted somewhere in the former scriptures, and that consequently Muslims have tried desperately to find these predictions for their prophet in those scriptures which preceded the Qur'an (the Taurat, Zabuur and the Injil), but to no

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avail. Yet we find it ironic that Muslims are now compelled by their own scripture to establish the credibility of their prophet in the Old Testament, the very book which they claim elsewhere to be corrupted and of no real worth (though this claim is never made in the Qur'an).

Muslims and Christians alike agree that Christ's coming was predicted often in the Old Testament. Yet, if God had intended to send another prophet far greater than He, we should naturally find predictions concerning him there as well. Yet, none are to be found. Therefore, without a prediction the sole criteria for Muhammad's authority rests entirely on the Qur'an, whose sole authority rests on Muhammad, and for obvious reasons this is unworkable.

[2] Muslims find Muhammad in the Old Testament:

Due to the predicament which Muslims find themselves in, they have, after a hurried perusal of our Bible, come forward with a series of twelve passages from the Old Testament which they believe point to Muhammad. Outside of the Deuteronomy 18 passage (dealt with above), all of these passages, which supposedly refer to a messenger, falls into four general categories.

1) This person is someone who used the **sword** (Psalm 45:2-5; 149; Isaiah 63). However, when we read further, the context in these passages clearly points out that the sword-wielder is not only God, but the Creator, the Lord of Israel and the Lord of Hosts. I know of few Muslims who would be willing to equate these titles with Muhammad.

2) This person is someone whose **life-style** parallels that of Muhammad's day (i.e rides a camel, lives in a desert) (Isaiah 21:7 and 53). Yet the context again refers to both a messenger from Babylon, and a servant who was crushed, pierced, and wounded for others, hardly analogous to Muhammad's life.

3) This person is someone whose **geographical** location coincides with that of Muhammad (Deuteronomy 33:2; Isaiah 63; Habakkuk 3:3). Yet the Mount Paran which they claim to be in Mecca is rather on the Sinai Peninsula, while Bozrah is not Basrah, but modern-day Al-Busairah, situated in Edom, south of the Dead Sea.

In Habbakuk 3:3 we read, "God comes from Teman."

Muslims maintain that Teman refers to Islam. To be consistent they must also adhere to the other prophecies concerning Teman. In Jeremiah 49:7 God questions whether there is any wisdom in Teman. Verse 20 says the people of Teman will be aghast at their fate. Ezekiel 25:13 promises that God will lay waste the people of Teman, and God will send fire and consume them (Amos 1:12), and there will be no survivors (Obadiah 8-10). This would suggest that there is no wisdom in Islam, and that there awaits all Muslims a destruction by fire which will consume them!

Fortunately for the Muslims, we know that this fate has no place in reality. For when we refer to the Biblical account we find that Teman is not Islam at all, but a town close to Jericho, in the territory of Edom.

4) This person is someone whose **name** has a common root to that of Muhammad. In Genesis 49:8-10 it is Judah; in the Song of Solomon 5:16 it is Ahmad; and in Haggai 2:7 it is Hemdah. This fourth category needs further discussion as it is adhered to more resolutely by the Muslims as real proof for a prediction than the others.

[3] Names which point to Muhammad:

Muslims believe that all of these three passages use names which can be translated as "praise" (Judah, Ahmad, and Hemdah), and are semantically similar to "Muhammad," which means "the praised one." However, in Arabic the verb "Hamada" (to praise) is the root for many words, yet one does not find Muslims substituting "Muhammad" and "Hamada" interchangeably.

Take for instance the very first Sura of the Qur'an. In the second ayya (verse) we find, "Praise (al-hamadi) be to Allah." Do we dare change this to Muhammad? Of course not! That is sacrilege!

In Haggai 2:7 Muslims believe "Hemdah" (the **desire** of nations) comes from the same root as the word "Muhammad." Yet they must certainly cringe when this word is again used in Daniel 11:37 to refer to a person "desired by women" who is a false god of the heathen.

[4] Song of Solomon 5:16

But perhaps the best example to illustrate the difficulty in exchanging one word for another is found in the **Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 16**. In this passage Muslims claim that the Hebrew word "Machmad" (altogether lovely) can be translated "praise" or "Ahmad." Following is the text of the passage as translated in the New International Version Bible:

"His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

The book of **Song of Solomon** is a poetic love story between the Beloved and her Lover. It is a piece that explores the beauty of a marriage relationship between a king and his wife.

Muslims believe that the **adjectival clause** "altogether lovely" can be changed to a **proper noun**, "Muhammad." The text should then read, when translated into English:

"His mouth is sweetness itself; he is Muhammad. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

This rendering, however, begs a number of difficult questions according to the context of the entire book.

1. Who are the daughters of Jerusalem? Did Muhammad ever court one of his many wives in Jerusalem?

2. If this is Muhammad, which of his wives is speaking? Was Muhammad ever married to a dark woman he wooed from Lebanon?

3. Did Muhammad ever claim kingship?

What, then, is this prophecy saying? The underlined words in the text above are the English renderings of the Hebrew word, **machmad**. Strong's concordance defines machmad as: desire, desirable thing, a pleasant thing.

So, can Machmad signify Muhammad? Wise men allow that when one verse is in doubt it is justified to explain one passage of the Bible by another. The word machmad appears twelve more times in the Old Testament. Since Muslims are so intent on finding the name of Muhammad in the Hebrew word "machmad," it is important that they remain consistent. Therefore, we have printed these twelve prophetic verses below and leave it to you to ascertain whether they fit. Note that we have been consistent in now translating this word as the long-neglected "proper noun" which they claim it to be.

1) 1 Kings 20:6= *"Yet I will send my servants to thee tomorrow about this time, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, [that] whatever is Muhammad in thy eyes, they shall take [it] in their hand, and carry [it] away."*

2) 2 Chronicles 36:19= *"And they burnt the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its Muhammad vessels."*

3) Isaiah 64:11= *"Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire: and all our Muhammad things are laid waste."*

4) Lamentations 1:10= *"The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her Muhammad things: for she hath seen [that] the nations entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command [that] they should not enter into thy congregation."*

5) Lamentations 1:11= *"All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their Muhammad things for food to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile."*

6) Lamentations 2:4= *"He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all [that were] Muhammad to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire."*

7) Ezekiel 24:16= *"Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the Muhammad of thy eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down."*

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8) Ezekiel 24:21= *"Speak to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellence of your strength, the Muhammad of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword."*

9) Ezekiel 24:25= *"Also, thou son of man, [shall it] not [be] in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the Muhammad of their eyes, and that on which they set their minds, their sons and their daughters."*

10) Hosea 9:6= *"For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them: the Muhammad [places] for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns [shall be] in their tabernacles."*

11) Hosea 9:16= *"Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay [even] the Muhammad [fruit] of their womb."*

12) Joel 3:5= *"Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my Muhammad things."*

If this mutilation of Scripture seems to you ridiculous, it is meant to be as it shows the quality of the theory behind such an idea.

When taken to its logical conclusion it makes a mockery of Hebrew grammar. Why should an adjectival clause be translated a proper noun? Machmad already has a proper noun counterpart, but more closely related to the clause -- **Chemdan** (or Hemdan), the eldest son of Dishon of Anah the Horite. If machmad should have been written as a proper noun the author would have written Chemdan.

[5] The Problem with this exercise:

This claim is quite similar to the issue of the paraclete in the book of John (which we will refer to later). Many Muslims contend that it is another prophecy of Muhammad. Yet this prophecy in John 14 and 16 has been shown for what it is -- a prophecy of the Spirit of God. We find it peculiar that Muslims will, in one text, base their claim on the meaning of one word at the expense of its pronunciation (paracletos versus pericyltos) and yet with another text base their claim on the pronunciation of a single word at the expense of its meaning (desire versus praise)!

If these techniques of hermeneutics are just, then wouldn't it be quite in line to expect to find as a substitute for the word paracletos a prophet named "Perry Clinton," whose name really means "the desired one?" Absurd? Yes! That is the point. Using this technique one can conjure up a prophecy for nearly any prophet one happens to fancy, or even make up one on the whim.

Conversely, a Hindu could claim that in Sura 30:1, the word "al-rum" (for Romans), which can be written "Ram," must be referring to the Hindu God "Rama."

A further irony in this whole exercise is that Muhammad is not even the name which the prophet grew up with. According to Muslim tradition, in his youth Muhammad was called **Amin**, a common Arab name meaning "faithful, or trustworthy." Amin was his given name, a masculine form from the same root as his mother's name "Amina."

We understand the desire by Muslims to find any prophecy which will give credence to Muhammad, for without it Muhammad has no outside evidence to prove his prophethood. That then leaves the authority for the beliefs of over one billion Muslims hanging on the single testimony of just **one finite man**. We ask, however, that Muslims not twist or attack the scriptures in order to gain their own agenda. We are constantly amazed that Muslims should be at once both critics and stewards of the Holy Scriptures of Christians and Jews. It would be better to be of one mind.

If Muslims firmly believe the scriptures are inadequate then they should behave as such and abstain from picking and choosing what they like from what they deem a hopelessly inadequate book.

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We will not insult them for bravely allying with other enemies of the Bible. But it is hypocrisy to use data from a book they claim is crude and inferior to support an already illogical argument.

If we truly believe the scriptures and desire to find prophecies within them, then we need to read them all and learn with an open mind. We need to truly submit ourselves to the authoritative and COMPLETE teachings of Scripture as has been diligently preserved throughout the ages.

[C] IS THERE A PROPHECY OF MUHAMMAD IN THE INJIL?

We now come to the final claim by Muslims, that a prediction of Muhammad can be found in the Injil, in other words in the New Testament.

[1] Parakletos or Periklytos?

The two ayas quoted at the beginning of this lecture speak of a prophet or messenger who will be described in the Taurat and Injil, who can neither read nor write, who will come after Jesus, and will be called Ahmed. Attempts have been made by Muslims since the middle of the 10th century to quote definite verses from the Bible which speak of Muhammad; verses such as Genesis 16:9-12; 17:20-21; 21:21 and Deuteronomy 33:2,12. These are easily defensible, and need little of our time.

Another scripture which is often quoted by Muslims as the definitive proof of a prediction concerning Muhammad is that found in the New Testament in **John 14:16** and **John 16:7**. These are the passages which we will deal with here.

Let's open to those passages. (Read **John 14:16** and **16:7**)

The problem comes with the word "Counsellor". All the misunderstanding which separates Jews, Christians and Muslims come from the manner in which one pronounces or writes parakletos, which the translators of the gospel have rendered as "counsellor." There are two popular spellings of this word, the one parakletos and the other periklytos?"

Muslims, aware that the original New Testament was written in Greek, choose the latter spelling, periklytos, which in Greek is translated as 'glorious', over parakletos which means 'counsellor', or 'lawyer'.

On the strength of the Qur'anic text Muslims claim that John 14:16 and 16:7 are predictions of the coming of Muhammad, as the word periklytos (glorious), refers to the Ahmad spoken of in Sura 61:6, a form of the name Muhammad, since both mean "the Praised one".

[2] Greek language confirms parakletos:

What the Muslims have tried to do with this word is to replace the vowels as they see fit (replacing the a-a-e-o in parakletos with e-i-y-o in periklytos). In Hebrew and Arabic, where the vowels are not included in the words, there is room for debate as to which vowels the author intended (such as YHWH), however, this is not so in Greek, as the vowels are clearly written in all Greek texts.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his footnotes in the Qur'an referring to this passage says: "Our doctors contend that Paracletos is a corrupt reading for Periklytos, and that in their original saying of Jesus there was a prophecy of our Holy Prophet Ahmad by name" (pg. 1461, note no.5438).

[3] Greek manuscripts confirm parakletos:

It would have been helpful if Ali and his learned "doctors", before making such an erroneous claim, had referred to existing manuscripts (MSS) which are easily accessible for examination (including two of the oldest, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Alexandrinus, both in the British Museum in London).

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There are more than 70 Greek manuscripts which include the book of John in existence today, dating from before the time of Muhammad, and not one of them use the word periklytos! All use the word parakletos. In fact the word periklytos does not even appear at all in the Bible! How then could the Muslims apply it to these two cases?

[4] Therefore Muhammad could not be the parakletos:

So why do Muslims continue to cling to the erroneous rendering of this word? Obviously, as we have mentioned before, Yusuf Ali and his friends have a deep desire to find any prediction for the coming of Muhammad in the Taurat and Injil. Not only does the Qur'an mention that the predictions exist, but more damaging for today, without it the sole criteria for Muhammad's authority takes on an invalid circular reasoning, which goes something like this: Muhammad receives his authority from the Qur'an, which receives its authority from Muhammad, who receives his authority from the Qur'an...so on and so forth. There is no outside authority which can provide him with the credibility he needs.

The evidence for any prediction by Jesus concerning Muhammad just does not exist in the Injil, creating a problem for Muslims who must, therefore, produce some further external criteria for the authenticity of their prophet. It's an unenviable task, one which I wouldn't want to have to do myself

[5] So who is the parakletos?:

A further problem for the Muslim exists once they open to the verses in question. John 14:16 says: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor (parakletos) to be with you for ever." Most Muslims quote only the first half of this verse, as well as John 16:7, and then shut the Bible.

What they fail to realize is that, as is the case in most pieces of literature, it is dangerous to read any verse or phrase without looking at the context first.

When we continue reading beyond chapter 14:16 and chapter 16:7, we find that Jesus predicts the specific details of the arrival and identity of the parakletos. Therefore, according to the context of John 14 & 16 we find that:

1)Jesus said the parakletos is not a human being:

- 14:16=*"he will be with you for ever"* (a human doesn't live forever)
- 14:17=*"he will be the spirit of truth"* (a human is distinct from spirit)
- 14:17=*"the world neither sees him..."* (a human is visible)
- 14:17=*"...nor knows him"* (a human would be known by others)
- 14:17=*"and he will be in you"* (a human cannot be within others)

2)Jesus said that the parakletos has a specific mission; to point to Jesus:

- 14:26=*"whom the Father will send in my (Jesus') name"*
- 14:26=*"will remind you everything I (Jesus) have said to you"*
- 16:8=*"he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin..."*
- 16:14=*"He will bring glory to me (Jesus)..."*

3)and finally, Jesus said that the parakletos is a spirit:

- 14:17=*"the Spirit of Truth"*
- 14:26=*"the Counselor (parakletos), the Holy Spirit"*

[6] The Answer is the Holy Spirit, who arrived 50 days later:

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It is clear from the context that no human prophet or angelic being can qualify as the parakletos. Consider what these verses say: He will be with them forever, not seen, nor known, yet within others, and will set about reminding the people of what Jesus did, while bringing glory to Jesus. There is only one being who qualifies in all these areas, the Holy Spirit of the Injil, whom Jesus pointedly identifies as the parakletos. He fulfills all the above requirements.

In **Acts 1**, Jesus, just before He was to be taken up into heaven, and 40 days after He had first promised the Holy Spirit, again spoke about this "gift":

-vs.4= "*wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about*"

-vs.5= "*in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*"

It is obvious that this counsellor, of whom Jesus speaks is indeed the Holy Spirit, who came in power, 50 days after these promises were given to the disciples; on the day of Pentecost (which is translated as the 50th day), and 537 years before the birth of Muhammad.

CONCLUSION

So what have we learned? We began this paper by asking whether Muhammad could qualify as a true prophet of God. We presented the Muslim positions, positing that they claimed his prophethood due to the supernatural witness to his prophethood during his early childhood, as well as the fact that he delivered the Qur'an, though he was illiterate, and because both his prophesies and miracles pointed to his prophethood.

We then gave rebuttals to all four of these positions and followed up with four criteria of our own, concluding that Muhammad could not qualify in any four of these categories.

Following that we took the question further by asking whether Muhammad's message was for Arabs alone, or whether it was universal. Though verses can be found in the Qur'an which maintain both positions, we determined that this particular revelation had possibly evolved and followed the polytheistic reality evidenced in Arabia at that time.

We asked whether Muhammad could be a prophet to the Jews and Christians, and came away bruised and battered from the violence he enjoined upon those two groups.

From there it was only natural to ask whether Muhammad could be understood as the seal of the prophets? In comparing him with Jesus and the former prophets we soon found that he didn't even come close. Not only did he concede his revelations to the people around him, but he had an enormous sexual appetite, while elevating himself almost on par with Allah. And finally, he, himself, realized that he had sinned and needed forgiveness.

In all these categories Muhammad failed to persuade us that he could legitimately claim to be a prophet of God. But our enquiry was still not finished. We needed to ascertain if others had spoken previously about this prophet who was yet to come.

In Suras 7:157 and 61:6 we read of a prophet, Ahmad (or Muhammad), who was revealed beforehand in the Taurat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel). Because these Suras are included in the "eternal and perfect" revelation for Muslims, it is imperative, therefore, that these passages be found, since without them, Muhammad has no outside evidence to prove his prophethood, other than himself.

Muhammad's word and authority worked fine in the "heady days" of the seventh century, where no-one dared counter his claim to prophethood, and where convenient revelations "descended" regularly to give him credibility before his people. But today, outside the realm of Islamic jurisdiction, and on the heels of an invigorated and ongoing literary criticism, the critics demand more proof. Without it the authority for the beliefs of over 1 billion Muslims then hangs on the single testimony of this **one finite man**, Muhammad. And many of those beliefs are diametrically opposed to the intrinsic revelations espoused in the scriptures which preceded him, the very scriptures which Muslims must now use to find a prediction for their prophet in order to give him credibility.

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There are, however, no passages in the Taurat or the Injil (essentially the Old and New Testaments) which speak of him, not one.

Muslims will certainly come forward and point to the passages in Deuteronomy 18, or the Song of Solomon 5:16, or John 14 and 16 as the one's which refer to Ahmad, or Muhammad. Yet, are they? Can this prophet like Moses, the promised one, this counsellor, be a mere human or a mere prophet; or is He more than that? Is He not God Himself, in the form of a man, or, as we found in John, in the form of the Holy Spirit?

As we read these verses and consider what has been said here, it will be good to feel encouraged that we do indeed serve the true God, who chooses to reveal Himself clearly and simply, from Genesis through to Revelation, and chooses to be in relationship with us as His creatures, by coming to us as a man in the line of Moses, while still relating to us by means of His Holy Spirit, mediating Christ in us.

Because Muslims do not understand God within these parameters, it is no wonder that they are confused to find that it is Jesus and not Muhammad who is prophesied to carry on the mission of reconciliation, and that it is the Holy Spirit who has been promised to continue that same mission today, right here and right now, until we will all be with Him together for eternity; providing we believe.

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HYDE PARK CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

(Jay Smith)
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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

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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).

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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).

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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.

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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).

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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.

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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.

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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 1 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.

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- 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!

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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

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(and must have known Greek as well, as He spoke to the centurian 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.

[D] 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

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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?

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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).

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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).*

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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

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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).

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).

[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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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** (ʿAbd 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

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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.

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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

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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,

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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)?

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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]

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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.

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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

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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:

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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.

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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 $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{6} + \frac{1}{8} = 1 \text{ and } \frac{1}{8}!!$ 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 $\frac{1}{3}$ according to sura 4:11, my wife would receive $\frac{1}{3}$ according to sura 4:12, and my two sisters would receive $\frac{2}{3}$'s according to sura 4:176, which when added up equals $\frac{15}{12}!!$

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:

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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.

j)* 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 4th 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 al-Bukhari', 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

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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).

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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/Dav/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?

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3) In **sura 4:162**, the phrase "And (especially) those who establish regular prayer..." is written as **al Muqiyhina al salaah**, which again is in the feminine plural form, instead of the masculine plural: **al Muqiyhuna al salaah** (?). 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) **Ashrat** (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.

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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 Umayyad and Abbasid 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

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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 musings 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 latter 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.'"

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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:

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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

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with thee; so consider what thou wilt command."

(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."

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

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:

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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:

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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).

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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 extant 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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THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'AN **AN HISTORICAL COMPARISON**

Often, when we find ourselves in conversation with Muslims the authority for that which we are discussing comes up and we are forced to answer the question: “which is the true Word of God, the Bible or the Qur'an?” As a Christian, I immediately affirm my own scriptures, maintaining that the Bible is the intrinsic Word of God. Obviously, for any Muslims, or others who may not have a religious position, this answer is not credible, as it involves a subjective statement of faith, one which cannot be proved or disproved, as there is no possibility of enquiry or verification. I am certain that when the same question is posed to a Muslim he likewise answers that the Qur'an qualifies as the final Word of God, and any further discussion ends. Both Christianity and Islam derive their set of beliefs from their revelations, the Bible and the Qur'an, yet we find that they disagree on a number of areas. One need only compare how each scripture deals with Jesus, sin, atonement, and salvation to understand that there are contradictory assertions held by both. Thus it is important to delineate which scripture can best make the claim to be the final and perfect Word of God.

When two documents which claim to be true are in contradiction, one must ascertain whether the contradictions can be explained adequately, using criteria which a non-believer, or a third party can accept; in other words, using criteria which goes beyond the adherents personal faith commitment to their revelation. Essentially one must ask whether the Qur'an or the Bible can stand up to verification, or whether they can withstand an external critical analysis for their authenticity. This is an immensely complex and difficult subject. Since both Islam and Christianity claim to receive their beliefs from the revealed truth which they find in their respective scriptures, to suspect the source for revealed truth, the scriptures for each faith is to put the integrity of both Christianity and Islam on trial.

Obviously this is not a task that one should take lightly, and I don't intend to do so here. For that reason, and because of the lack of time and space, I have decided not to make a comparison between the claims the two revelations make for themselves, but simply ask the question of whether the two scriptures can be corroborated by history; in other words whether there is any historical data or evidence which we can find that can help us verify that which they claim is true.

I start with the presupposition that God has intersected time and space and has revealed His truth to His creation. We should expect to see, therefore, evidence of those revelations in history, and be able to corroborate the historical claims the revelations make by an historical analysis. Both the Bible and the Qur'an claim to have been revealed at a certain place, and over a period of time. They speak of people, places, and events. If they are true, then we should be able to find evidence for their claims, and especially corroboration for what they say in the period in which they themselves profess they were revealed; the Bible between 1,447 B.C. and 70 AD, and the Qur'an between 610 AD and 632 AD. My intent in this study is to look at the historical data which exists in these periods, and ascertain whether they support or deny the claims for the historicity of both the Bible and the Qur'an. This I will attempt to do by looking at three areas of evidence; that provided by manuscripts, documents and archaeological data from the periods mentioned above. If the manuscript, documentary and archaeological evidence supports the claims for the Bible or the Qur'an, then we can assume their reliability. However, if the evidence denies their historicity, then we have to question their authenticity.

I will admit that this study is nothing more than a mere ‘overview,’ with the desire that it will stimulate others to continue investigating this very important area in their own time. The hope is that, like Peter before us, we too can **“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have” (1 Peter 3:15).**

[II] MANUSCRIPT ANALYSIS:

Let's then begin by looking at the area of manuscript evidence. What manuscripts do we have in Islam which can corroborate the authenticity for Qur'an that we have in our hands today, and likewise, what Christian manuscripts are available to validate the Bible?

[A] THE QUR'AN'S MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE:

A manuscript analysis of the Qur'an does present us with unique problems not encountered with the

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Bible. While we can find multiple manuscripts for the Bible written 700-900 years earlier, at a time when durable paper was not even used, the manuscripts for the Qur'an within the century in which it was purported to have been compiled, the seventh century, simply do not exist. Prior to 750 AD (thus for 100 years after Muhammad's death) we have no verifiable Muslim documents which can give us a window into this formative period of Islam (Wansbrough 1978:5859). In fact the primary sources which we possess are 1500 years after the events which they describe, and therefore are quite distant from those events (Nevo 1994:108; Wansbrough 1978:119; Crone 1987:204). For that reason they are, for all practical purposes, secondary sources, as they rely on other material, much of which no longer exists. We simply do not have any "account from the 'Islamic' community during the [initial] 150 years or so, between the first Arab conquests [the early 7th century] and the appearance, with the *siramağhazi* narratives, of the earliest Islamic literature" [the late 8th century] (Wansbrough 1978:119).

We should expect to find, in those intervening 150 years, at least remnants of evidence for the development of the old Arab religion towards Islam (i.e. Muslim traditions); yet we find nothing (Nevo 1994:108; Crone 1980:58). The documentary evidence at our disposal, prior to 750 AD "consists almost entirely of rather dubious citations in later compilations" (Humphreys 1991:80). Consequently, we have no reliable proof that the later Muslim traditions speak truly of the life of Muhammad, or even of the Qur'an (Schacht 1949:143-154). In fact we have absolutely no evidence for the original Qur'anic text (Schimmel 1984:4). Nor do we have any of the alleged four copies which were made of this recension and sent to Mecca, Medina, Basra and Damascus (see Gilchrist's arguments in his book *Jam' alQur'an*, 1989, pp. 140-154, as well as Ling's & Safadi's *The Qur'an* 1976, pp. 1117).

[1] DEARTH OF MANUSCRIPTS:

Why can we find nothing from before 800 AD? Could it be a shortage of writing material in the earlier period, the great prestige of oral tradition amongst the Arabs, or the destruction of these materials?

a) Objection 1: Arabs were an Oral culture:

One could maintain that the late dates of the primary sources can be attributed to the fact that writing was simply not used in such an isolated area at that time, as the Arab people in the *Hijaz* (the central part of Arabia where Muhammad supposedly lived and died) were a nomadic people, and as such had no literary tradition. This assumption would be unfounded, however, as writing on paper in that part of the world began long before the seventh century. Writing paper was invented in the fourth century, and used extensively throughout the civilised world thereafter. The Umayyad dynasty was headquartered in the former Byzantine area of Syria (and not Arabia). Thus it was a sophisticated society and used secretaries in the Caliphal courts, proving that manuscript writing was well developed there.

Furthermore, we are told that Arabia in the seventh century and earlier was an area of trade with caravans plying routes north-south, and possibly east and west. While the evidence shows that the trade was primarily local (as we will discuss later), caravans were in use. How did the caravaneers keep their records? They certainly didn't memorise the figures.

And finally, we must ask how we came by the Qur'an if there was no-one capable of putting-pen-to-paper before that time? This is not just another ordinary piece of literature, but acclaimed to be the greatest of all revelations, second to none. Certainly copies would have been retained of something so important. Muslims claim the existence of a number of codices of the Qur'an shortly after the death of Muhammad, such as those of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Abu Musa, and Ubayy b. Ka'b (Pearson 1986:406). What were these codices if they were not written documents? The Uthmanic text itself had to have been written, otherwise it would not be a text! Writing was available, but for some reason, no record was kept of those supposed earlier documents prior to 750 AD

b) Objection 2: The documents became aged and disintegrated:

Could it be that the absence of early documentation be the result of old age? Did the materials upon which the primary sources were written either disintegrate over time, leaving us with few examples today, or did they wear out from heavy handling, and so were destroyed?

This argument would also be difficult to accept. In the British Library we have a number of documents written by individuals in communities which were not too distant from Arabia, yet they predate these manuscripts by hundreds of years. On display are New Testament manuscripts such as the Codex Syriaticus and the Codex Alexandrinus, both of which were written in the fourth century, three to four hundred years before the period in question! Why have they not disintegrated with age?

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The argument of age and disintegration would have particular difficulty when applied to the Qur'an itself. The "Uthmanic text" of the Qur'an (the final canon supposedly compiled by Zaid ibn Thabit, under the direction of the third caliph Uthman) is considered by all Muslims to be the most important piece of literature ever written. As we noted earlier, according to Sura 43:24, it comes from the "mother of books." Its importance lies in the fact that it is considered to be an exact replica of the "eternal tablets" which exist in heaven (Sura 85:22; see Yusuf Ali's note at the bottom of the page). Muslim tradition informs us that all other competing codices and manuscripts were destroyed after 646/650 AD. Even "Hafsah's copy," from which the final recension was retrieved, was burned. If this Uthmanic text was so important, why then was it not written on paper, or other material which would have lasted till today? Certainly, if the earliest manuscripts wore out with usage, they would have been replaced with others written on skin, like so many other older documents which are still in existence today.

We have absolutely no evidence for the original Qur'anic text (Schimmel 1984:4). Nor do we have any of the alleged four copies which were made of this recension and sent to Mecca, Medina, Basra and Damascus (see Gilchrist's arguments in his book Jam' alQur'an, 1989, pp. 140-154, as well as Lings & Safadi's The Qur'an 1976, pp. 11-17). Even if these copies had somehow disintegrated with age, there would surely be some fragments of the documents which we could refer to.

By the end of the seventh century Islam had expanded right across North Africa and up into Spain, and east as far as India. The Qur'an (according to tradition) was the centrepiece of their faith. Certainly within that enormous sphere of influence there should be some Qur'anic documents or manuscripts which still exist till this day. Yet, there are no verifiable manuscripts from that period.

As a comparison, Christianity can claim over 230 manuscripts of the New Testament which predate the sixth century (McDowell 1972:39-49). On top of that it can produce more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, a further 10,000 Latin Vulgates and at least 9,300 other early versions, adding up to over 24,000 New Testament manuscripts (or portions of) still in existence which correspond with the earlier manuscripts (McDowell; 1990:43-55); yet Islam can not provide a single manuscript until well into the eighth century (Lings & Safadi 1976:17; Schimmel 1984:4-6). If the Christians could retain so many thousands of ancient manuscripts, many of which were written long before the seventh century, at a time when paper had not yet been introduced, forcing the dependency on papyrus which disintegrated, then one wonders why the Muslims are not able to forward a single manuscript from this much later period, when it was supposedly revealed? This indeed presents a problem for the argument that the earliest Qur'ans all simply disintegrated with age, or were destroyed because they were worn.

c) Objection 3: Early Manuscripts do Exist:

There are Muslims who maintain that there is evidence of earlier traditions, principally the Muwatta by Malik ibn Anas (born in 712 AD and died in 795 AD). Norman Calder in his book Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence disagrees with such an early date and questions whether works can be attributed to the authors listed. He argues that most of the texts we have from these supposedly early authors are "school texts," transmitted and developed over several generations, and achieving the form in which we know them considerably later than the putative "authors" to whom they are usually ascribed. Following the current assumption that "Shafi'i's law" (which demanded that all hadith be traced to Muhammad) did not come into effect until after 820 AD, he concluded that because the Mudawwana does not speak of Muhammad's prophetic authority whereas the Muwatta does, the Muwatta must be the later document. Consequently, Calder positions the Muwatta not prior to 795 AD, but sometime after the Mudawwana which was supposedly written in 854 AD. In fact Calder places the Muwatta not even in eighth century Arabia but in eleventh century Cordoba, Spain (Calder 1993). If he is correct then we are indeed left with little evidence of any traditions from the early period of Islam.

It has been suggested that Muhammad's letters date from his life-time and so are easily the earliest documents which we possess. Yet these letters are not known except from later quotations in the later traditions (i.e. Tabari's history or Ibn Saad's Tabakhath). In fact the only place we can find them mentioned are from later 9th and 10th century documents. There are several letters which are today claimed to be authentic, but no-one has taken the time to prove that they are authentic, and no Muslim scholar has applied to them the forensic testing required of similar documents in question. Thus they are considered to be later works of pious people attributed back (redacted) to Muhammad.

Furthermore Muslims contend that they do have in their possession a number of the "Uthmanic recensions," dating from the seventh century. I have heard Muslims claim that there are original copies in Mecca, in Cairo and in almost every ancient Islamic settlement. I have often asked them to furnish me with the data which would substantiate their antiquity; a task which, to date, nobody has been able to carry out.

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There are two documents, however, which do hold some credibility, and to which many Muslims refer. These are the Samarkand Manuscript, which is located in the Soviet State Library, at Tashkent, Uzbekistan (in the southern part of the former Soviet Union), and the Topkapi Manuscript, which can be found in the Topkapi Museum, in Istanbul, Turkey.

These two documents are indeed old, and there has been ample enough etymological and paleographical analysis done on them by scriptologists, as well as experts in Arabic calligraphy to warrant their discussion here.

Samarkand Manuscript: (taken from Gilchrist's Jam' al-Qur'an 1989, pp. 148150)

The Samarkand Manuscript is not at all a complete document. In fact, out of the 114 suras found in today's Qur'ans, only parts of suras 2 to 43 are included. Of these suras much of the text is missing (Gilchrist 1989:139). The actual inscription of the text in the Samarkand codex presents a real problem, as it is very irregular. Some pages are neatly and uniformly copied out while others are quite untidy and imbalanced (Gilchrist 1989:139 and 154). On some pages the text is fairly expansive, while on other pages it is severely cramped and condensed. At times the Arabic letter *KAF* has been excluded from the text, while at others it is included and in fact is the dominant letter in the text. Because so many pages of the manuscript differ so extensively from one another, the assumption is that it is a composite text, compiled from portions of different manuscripts (Gilchrist 1989:150). This would imply that it had been written by later scribes and compiled into one document at a later date.

Also within the text one can find artistic illuminations between the suras, usually made up of coloured bands of rows of squares, as well as 151 red, green, blue and orange medallions. It is possible that these illuminations were added later, though they have compelled the scriptologists to give the codex a ninth century origin, as it is grossly unlikely that such embellishments would have accompanied a seventh century Uthmanic manuscript sent out to the various provinces (Lings & Safadi 1976:1720; Gilchrist 1989:151).

Topkapi Manuscript:

The Topkapi Manuscript in Istanbul, Turkey is also written on parchment, and devoid of vocalization (Gilchrist, 1989, pp.151153; see Von Denffer 1989:plate3). Like the Samarkand MS it is supplemented with ornamental medallions indicating a later age (Lings & Safadi 1976:1720). Muslims claim that this too must be one of the original copies, if not the original one compiled by Zaid ibn Thabit. Yet one only needs to compare it with the Samarkand codex to realise that they most certainly cannot both be Uthmanic originals. For instance, the Topkapi codex has 18 lines to the page whereas the Samarkand codex has only half that many (between 8 and 12 lines to the page); the Topkapi codex is inscribed throughout in a very formal manner, the words and lines quite uniformly written out, while the text of the Samarkand codex is often haphazard and considerably distorted. One cannot believe that both these manuscripts were copied out by the same group of scribes.

[2] RESPONSES

a) Response 1: AMS Analysis:

Experts in manuscript analysis use three tests for ascertaining their age. To begin with they test the age of the paper on which the manuscript is written, using such chemical processes as Carbon-14 dating. This is adequate for recent documents such as the Qur'an, as precise dating of between plus or minus 20 years is possible. There has been a reticence to use it, however, because the amount of material that has to be destroyed in the process (1-3 grams) would require the loss of too much of the manuscript. A more refined form of carbon-14 dating known as AMS (Accelerated Mass Spectrometry) is now used requiring only 0.5-1.0 mg. of material for testing (Vanderkam 1994:17). As yet neither of these manuscripts have been tested by this more advanced and precise method.

Experts also study the ink of the manuscript and analyse its makeup, discerning from where it originated, or if it had been erased and copied over. But the age for these documents would be difficult to pinpoint because of the lateness of the document. These problems are compounded by the inaccessibility for westerners of these manuscripts for detailed research, due to a fear by those who guard them.

b) Response 2: Script Analysis

Thus the specialists must go to the script itself to analyse whether the manuscript is recent or old. This study is better known as 'Palaeography'. Styles of letter formation change over time. These changes tend to be uniform as manuscripts were usually written by professional scribes. Consequently the penmanship tended to follow easy-to-delineate conventions, with only gradual modifications (Vanderkam 1994:16). By examining the handwriting in texts whose dates are already known, and noting their development over time, a palaeographer can compare them with other undated texts, and thereby ascertain the time period in which they belong.

It is when we apply the palaeographical test to both the Samarkand and Topkapi manuscripts that we

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arrive at some interesting conclusions concerning their dates. It is this evidence which is proving to be the most serious argument against the possibility that either of these two manuscripts could be those copied out for Uthman, or that they were even in existence in the seventh century.

-The Kufic Script:

What many Muslims do not realise is that these two manuscripts are written in the *Kufic* Script, a script which according to modern Qur'anic experts, such as Martin Lings and Yasin Hamid Safadi, did not appear until late into the eighth century (790s and later), and was not in use at all in Mecca and Medina in the seventh century (Lings & Safadi 1976:1213,17; Gilchrist 1989:145146; 152153).

The reasons for this are quite simple. Consider: The *Kufic* script, properly known as *alKhatt alKufi*, derives its name from the city of Kufa in Iraq (Lings & Safadi 1976:17). There are those who believe that the script predated the city, yet it would be rather odd for this to be the official script of an Arabic Qur'an as it is a script which takes its name from a city that had only been conquered by the Arabs a mere 1014 years earlier.

It is important to note that the city of Kufa, which is in present day Iraq, was a city which would have been Sassanid or Persian before that time (637 AD). Thus, while Arabic would have been known there, and used by traders, it would not have been the predominant language, let alone the predominant script until much later. The *Pahlavi* script would have been the predominant script in that city prior to the conquest by the Arabs.

While we know that Kufa was established by the Arabs in 639 AD and became the capital later on during Ali's caliphate, we know in fact, that the *Kufic* script reached its perfection during the late eighth century (up to one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death) and thereafter it became widely used throughout the Muslim world (Lings & Safadi 1976:12,17; Gilchrist 1989:145146).

This stands to reason, since after 750 AD the Abbasids controlled Islam, and due to their Persian background were headquartered in the Kufa and Baghdad areas. They would have wanted their script to dominate. Having been themselves dominated by the Umayyads (who were based in Damascus) for around 100 years, it would now be quite understandable that an Arabic script which originated in their area of influence, such as the *Kufic* script would evolve into that which we find in these two documents mentioned here.

-Early Muslim Coins:

As we mentioned earlier styles of letter formation change over time, and these changes tend to be uniform as manuscripts were usually written by professional scribes, with the result that the penmanship tended to follow easy-to-delineate conventions, with only gradual modifications (Vanderkam 1994:16). If only we could examine the handwriting in texts whose dates were already known, we would then be able to note the development of the script over time, comparing them with other undated texts, and thereby ascertaining the time period in which they belonged. Unfortunately, until recently it was difficult to carry out this exercise as there simply were no manuscripts which the palaeographer could go to for models of the development of the Arabic script. Fortunately that difficulty has been alleviated somewhat. We have at our disposal coins from the earliest Muslim dynasties which are dated and which use extensive Qur'anic inscriptions. It is when we look at them that we find this clear evolution in the Arabic script.

The Arabs of the conquest had no coinage of their own. Thus the earliest coins from the 'Umayyad' Dynasty were adaptations of Byzantine and Sasanian prototypes (see figures 1.3, 1.4, 2.1 and 2.2, taken from *Islamic Coins*, by Michael L. Bates, American Numismatic Society, NY, 1982, pgs.4-6).

They were used by the caliphs: Mu'awiyah 661-680 AD, Yazid I 680-683 AD, by Mu'awiyah II 683-684 AD, and finally by Marwan I from 684-685 AD. Thus these coins were in constant use from the time of the caliph Uthman (656 AD), right on through the Sufyani period and part of the Marwanid period of the early Umayyad Dynasty up to as late as 705 AD (Bates 1982:5-7).

One will note that they employ imperial portraits borrowed from the Sassanid and Byzantine era, sometimes adding short Arabic inscriptions.

In 692 AD, the Caliph at that time, Abd al-Malik is credited with an 'Arabization' policy, throwing out all Byzantine Christian influences and replacing it with an Arab emphasis, replacing the images on the coins with ones of his own.

It is interesting to note that people were pictured on the face of the coin, a practice which one would think would not have been permitted by early Islam. They show the remnants of a cross on a pedestal (though the cross-piece itself has been removed), echoing the Byzantine Christian nature behind these coins.

These experiments in Muslim iconography were to be short-lived, however, for Islam forbade the use of objects or images as vehicles of devotion. Thus the caliph Abd al-Malik introduced the first purely Islamic coins in the form of gold dinars around 697 AD (see figures 7.1, 7.2, 8.1 and 8.2 found in *Islamic Coins*, by Michael L. Bates, American Numismatic Society, NY, 1982, pgs. 12-13)

It is apparent that there are no icons or pictures on these coins. Only Arabic inscriptions are permitted

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using a pre-Kufic (or *Mashq*?) script. What is of most importance for our discussion here, however, is that the majiscules in this script are all upright and close together, and therefore distinctly different from the later Kufic script.

These coins, introduced by Abd al-Malik at the end of the seventh century (during the Marwanid period) were used by the caliphs Walid from 705-715 AD, by Suleyman from 715-717 AD, by Umar II from 717-720 AD, by Hisham from 720-743, and finally by Marwan II from 744-750 AD. Thus all of the Umayyad caliphs from Abd al-Malik's time used these coins which employed this same pre-Kufic script.

From the Abbasid period we find a change in the coinage. The capital of Islam was moved down to Baghdad, and the caliphs in that area changed the coinage to reflect their own identity. The script which they employed on their coins reveals much for our current discussion. Notice the coins which were produced from 745 AD onwards (see figures 11.1, -11.3, 12.1-12.4, 13.1- 13.2, 14.1, and 14.2 found in Islamic Coins, by Michael L. Bates, American Numismatic Society, NY, 1982, pgs. 16-17).

The silver and gold Dirhams pictured in these coins date from 745 AD to 837 AD, which would place them from the early Abbasid period onwards. What one notices right away is the script that is used on these coins. This is the official Kufic script. It is an elongated script, in that there is a horizontal line employed between the majiscules (letters). It is this script which we find in the Topkapi and Samarkand manuscripts of the Qur'an.

One needs to compare the scripts between the manuscript from the Samarkand [or Samarqand] ms, and the coins from the Abbasid era. The scripts are indeed similar. Both use the long horizontal lines between the majiscules typical of the Kufic script.

What these coins show us is that the Kufic script which we find evidenced in both the Topkapi and Samarkand manuscripts was probably not introduced into Islamic writing until the Abbasid period, or after 750 AD, as it is only then that we find this script evidenced on any coins. Thus neither of these documents could have been written or compiled in the mid-seventh century, as the script which was used then was a pre-Kufic script, also evidenced by the coins above.

c) Response 3: The Landscape Format:

Another factor which points to the late dates for these two manuscripts are the format with which they are written. One will observe that due to the elongated style of the Kufic script they both use paper which is wider than it is tall. This is known as the "Landscape format," a format borrowed from Syriac and Iraqi Christian documents of the eighth and ninth centuries. The earlier Arabic manuscripts were all written in the "upright format" (thanks to Dr. Hugh Goodacre of the Oriental and India Office Collections, who pointed this fact out to me in May 1996).

Therefore, it stands to reason that both the Topkapi and Samarkand Manuscripts, because they are written in the *Kufic* script, and because they use the landscape format could not have been written earlier than 100-150 years after the Uthmanic Recension was supposedly compiled; at the earliest the mid to late 700s or early 800s (Gilchrist 1989:144147).

d) Response 4: Ma'il and Mashq Scripts:

So what script would have been used in the *Hijaz* (Arabia) at that time? We do know that there were two earlier Arabic scripts which most modern Muslims are not familiar with. These are the *alMa'il* Script, developed in the *Hijaz*, particularly in Mecca and Medina, and the *Mashq* Script, also developed in Medina (Lings & Safadi 1976:11; Gilchrist 1989:144145). The *alMa'il* Script came into use in the seventh century and is easily identified, as it was written at a slight angle (see the example below taken from page 16 of Gilchrist's Jam' alQur'an, 1989). In fact the word *alMa'il* means "slanting." This script survived for about two centuries before falling into disuse.

The *Mashq* Script also began in the seventh century, but continued to be used for many centuries. It is more horizontal in form and can be distinguished by its somewhat cursive and leisurely style (Gilchrist 1989:144).

If the Qur'an had been compiled at this time in the seventh century, then one would expect it to have been written in either the *Ma'il* or *Mashq* script.

Interestingly, we do have a Qur'an written in the *Ma'il* script, and considered to be the earliest Qur'an in our possession today. Yet it is not found in either Istanbul or Tashkent, but, ironically, resides in the British Library in London (Lings & Safadi 1976:17,20; Gilchrist 1989:16,144). It has been dated towards the end of the eighth century (790 AD), by Martin Lings, the former curator for the manuscripts of the British Library, who is himself, a practising Muslim.

Therefore, with the help of script analysis on both manuscripts and coins, we are quite certain that there is no known manuscript of the Qur'an which we possess today which can be dated from the mid seventh

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century (Gilchrist 1989:147-148,153).

Furthermore, virtually all the earliest Qur'anic manuscript fragments which we do possess cannot be dated earlier than 100 years after the time of Muhammad. In her book Calligraphy and Islamic Culture, Annemarie Schimmel underlines this point when she states that apart from the recently discovered [Korans] in Sanaa, "the earliest datable fragments go back to the first quarter of the eighth century." (Schimmels 1984:4)

Interestingly, these Qur'ans from Sanaa still remain a mystery, as the Yemeni government has not permitted the Germans who discovered them to publish their findings. Could this be a possible cover-up due to what these 'earliest' Qur'ans might reveal? There have been suggestions that the script in these early 'eighth century' Qur'ans does not correspond to that which we have today. We still wait to know the whole truth.

From the evidence we do have, however, it would seem improbable that portions of the Qur'an supposedly copied out at Uthman's direction have survived. What we are left with is the intervening 150 years for which we cannot account.

The revisionist school today is highly sceptical of the late dates for documents of both the Qur'an and the Muslim tradition. It seems, from the discussion above that more time needs to be given towards answering this very real problem. But this by-no-means is the sole difficulty with early Islamic manuscripts.

(2) TALMUDIC SOURCES IN THE QUR'AN:

Another problem with manuscript evidence for the Qur'an is that of the heretical Talmudic accounts found within its passages. Possibly the greatest puzzlement for Christians who pick up the Qur'an and read it are the numerous seemingly Biblical stories which bear little similarity to the Biblical accounts. The Qur'anic stories include many distortions, amendments, and some bizarre additions to the familiar stories we have known and learned. So, we ask, where did these stories come from, if not from the previous scriptures?

Fortunately, we do have much Jewish and Christian apocryphal literature (some of it from the *Talmud*), dating from the second century AD 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 of the later Jewish and Christian communities, and the stories which are recounted in the Qur'an (note: Talmudic material taken from Feinburg 1993:1162-1163).

The Jewish *Talmudic* writings were compiled in the second century AD, from oral laws (*Mishnah*) and traditions of those laws (*Gemara*). These laws and traditions were 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.). Most Jews do not consider the Talmudic writings authoritative, but they read them nonetheless with interest for the light they cast on the times in which they were written.

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 among 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 (Feinburg 1993:1163).

Some orientalist scholars believe that when later Islamic compilers came onto the scene, in the eighth to ninth centuries AD, they merely added this body of literature to the nascent Qur'anic material. It is therefore, not surprising that a number of these traditions from Judaism were inadvertently accepted by later redactors, and incorporated into the 'holy writings' of Islam.

There are quite a few stories which have their root in second century (AD) Jewish apocryphal literature; stories such as the murder of Abel by Cain in sura 5:31-32, borrowed from the Targum of Jonathan-ben-Uzziah and the Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5; or the story of Abraham, the idols and the fiery furnace in sura 21:51-71, taken from the Midrash Rabbah; or the amusing story found in sura 27:17-44, of Solomon, his talking Hoopoo bird, and the queen of Sheba who lifts her skirt when mistaking a mirrored floor for water, taken from the 2nd Targum of Esther.

There are other instances where we find both apocryphal Jewish and Christian literature within the Qur'anic text. The account of Mt. Sinai being lifted up and held over the heads of the Jews as a threat for rejecting the law (sura 7:171) comes from the second century Jewish apocryphal book, The Abodah Sarah. The odd accounts of the early childhood of Jesus in the Qur'an can be traced to a number of Christian apocryphal writings: the Palm tree which provides for the anguish of Mary after Jesus's birth (sura 19:22-26) comes from The Lost Books of the Bible; while the account of the infant Jesus creating birds from clay (sura 3:49) comes from Thomas' Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ. The story of the baby Jesus talking (sura 19:29-33) can be traced to Arabic apocryphal fable from Egypt named The first Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ.

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 find this *aya* refers to Muhammad ascending up to the seventh

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heaven, after a miraculous night journey (the *Mi'raj*) from Mecca to Jerusalem, on a “winged-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 analogous account is that of The Secrets of Enoch (chapter 1:4-10 and 2:1), which predates the Qur'an by four centuries. Yet a further similar account is largely modelled on the story contained in the old Persian book entitled Arta-i Viraf Namak, telling how a pious young Zoroastrian ascended to the skies, and, on his return, related what he had seen, or professed to have seen (Pfander 1835:295-296).

The Qur'anic description of Hell resembles the descriptions of hell in the Homilies of Ephraim, a Nestorian preacher of the sixth century (Glubb 1971:36)

The author of the Qur'an in suras 42:17 and 101:6-9 possibly 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.

It is important to remember that the Talmudic accounts were not considered by the orthodox Jews of that period as authentic for one very good reason: they were not in existence at the council of Jamnia in 80 AD when the Old Testament was canonized. Neither were the Christian apocryphal material considered canonical, as they were not attested as authoritative both prior to and after the council of Nicea in 325 AD. Thus these accounts have always been considered as heretical by both the Jewish and Christian orthodox believers, and the literate ever since. It is for this reason that we find it deeply suspicious that the apocryphal accounts should have made their way into a book claiming to be the final revelation from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Let's now look at the manuscript evidence for the Bible and ascertain whether the scripture which we read today is historically accurate?

[B] THE BIBLE'S MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE:

Unlike the Qur'an, when we consider the New Testament manuscripts (MSS) we are astounded by the sheer numbers of extent copies which are in existence. Muslims contend, however, that since we do not have the original documents, the reliability of the copies we do have is thus in doubt. Yet is this assumption correct?

(1) New Testament Manuscript Copies:

Because the Bible is a book, it was initially made up of manuscripts. Consequently a primary means for ascertaining its credibility today are the number of copies from those manuscripts which are currently in one's possession. The more copies we have the better we can compare between them and thus know if the document we now read corresponds with the original. It is much like a witness to an event. If we have only one witness to the event, there is the possibility that the witness's agenda or even an exaggeration of the event has crept in and we would never know the full truth. But if we have many witnesses, the probability that they all got it wrong becomes minute.

Because of time and wear many of the historical documents from the ancient world have few manuscripts to which we can refer. This is specially true when we consider the secular historians and philosophers. For instance, we only have eight copies of Herodotus's historical works, whose originals were written in 480-425 BC. Likewise, only 5 copies of Aristotle's writings have found their way to the 20th century, while only 10 copies of the writings of Caesar, along with another 20 copies of the historian Tacitus, and 7 copies from the historian Pliny, who all originally wrote in the first century, are available today (McDowell 1972:42). These are indeed very few.

When we consider the New Testament, however, we find a completely different scenario. We have today in our possession 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, another 10,000 Latin Vulgates, and 9,300 other early versions (MSS), giving us more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today! (taken from McDowell's Evidence That demands a Verdict, vol.1, 1972 pgs.40-48; and Time, January 23, 1995, pg.57). Though we do not have any originals, with such a wealth of documentation at our disposal with which to compare, we can delineate quite closely what those originals contained.

What's more, a substantial number were written well before the compilation of the Qur'an. In fact, according to research done by Kurt and Barbara Aland, a total of 230 manuscript portions are currently in existence which pre-date 600 AD! These can be broken down into 192 Greek New Testament manuscripts, 5 Greek lectionaries containing scripture, and 33 translations of the Greek New Testament (Aland 1987:82-83).

Muslims assert that we have similar problems concerning the large number of years which separate the manuscripts from the events which they speak about. Yet, unlike the Qur'an which was compiled much more

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recently, we do not find with the Bible such an enormous gap of time between that which the Bible speaks about and when it was written down. In fact, outside of the book of Revelation and the three letters of John considered to have been written later, when we look at the rest of the New Testament books, there is no longer any solid basis for dating them later than 80 AD, or 50 years after the death of Jesus Christ (Robinson 1976:79). Most of the New Testament was likely written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and perhaps before the fire of Rome (64 AD), and the subsequent persecution of Christians, since none of these events, which would have had an enormous impact on the nascent Christian community are mentioned in any of the New Testament writings. Had the documents been compiled in the second century as Muslims claim, then certainly they would have mentioned these very important events.

This same logic can be taken a step further. Take for instance the martyrdoms of James in 62 AD, Paul in 64 AD, and Peter in 65 AD. All were leaders in the nascent church. Thus their deaths were momentous events for the early Christian community. Yet we find none of the deaths referred to in any of the 27 canonized books of the New Testament (and significantly not in Acts, the most comprehensive historical record we have of the early church). The only explanation can be that they were all written prior to these events, and thus likely before 62 AD, or a mere 30 years after the death of Jesus, of whose life they primarily refer.

(2) Available Manuscripts:

A further criticism concerns whether the copies we possess are credible. Since we do not possess the originals, people ask, how can we be sure they are identical to them? The initial answer is that we will never be completely certain, for there is no means at our disposal to reproduce the originals. This has always been a problem with all known ancient documents. Yet this same question is rarely asked of other historical manuscripts which we refer to constantly. If they are held to be credible, let's then see how the New Testament compares with them. Let's compare below the time gaps for the New Testament documents with other credible secular documents.

There were several historians of the ancient world whose works are quite popular. *Thucydides*, who wrote History of the Peloponnesian War, lived from 460 BC to 400 BC. Virtually everything we know about the war comes from his history. Yet, the earliest copy of any manuscripts of *Thucydides'* work dates around 900 AD, a full 1,300 years later! The Roman historian *Suetonius* lived between AD 70 to 140 AD. Yet the earliest copy of his book The Twelve Caesars is dated around AD 950, a full 800 years later. The chart below reveals the time gaps of these and other works from the ancient world and compares them to the earliest New Testament manuscripts (taken from McDowell 1972:42, & Bruce 1943:16-17).

<u>Author</u>	<u>Date Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Copies (extent)</u>
Secular Manuscripts:				
Herodotus (History)	480 - 425 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	8
Thucydides (History)	460 - 400 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	?
Aristotle (Philosopher)	384 - 322 BC	1,100 AD	1,400 years	5
Caesar (History)	100 - 44 BC	900 AD	1,000 years	10
Pliny (History)	61 - 113 AD	850 AD	750 years	7
Suetonius (Roman History)	70 - 140 AD	950 AD	800 years	?
Tacitus (Greek History)	100 AD	1,100 AD	1,000 years	20

Biblical Manuscripts: (note these are individual manuscripts)

Magdalene Ms (Matthew 26)	1st century	50-60 AD	co-existent(?)
John Rylands (John)	90 AD	130 AD	40 years
Bodmer Papyrus II (John)	90 AD	150-200 AD	60-110 years
Chester Beatty Papyri (N.T.)	1st century	200 AD	150 years
Diatessaron by Tatian (Gospels)	1st century	200 AD	150 years
Codex Vaticanus (Bible)	1st century	325-350 AD	275-300 years
Codex Sinaiticus (Bible)	1st century	350 AD	300 years
Codex Alexandrinus (Bible)	1st century	400 AD	350 years

(Total New Testament manuscripts = 5,300 Greek MSS, 10,000 Latin Vulgates, 9,300 others = 24,000 copies)

(Total MSS compiled prior to 600 AD = 230)

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What one notices almost immediately from the table is that the New Testament manuscript copies which we possess today were compiled very early, a number of them hundreds of years before the earliest copy of a secular manuscript. This not only shows the importance the early Christians gave to preserving their scriptures, but the enormous wealth we have today for early Biblical documentation.

What is even more significant however, are the differences in time spans between the original manuscripts and the copies of both the biblical and secular manuscripts. It is well known in historical circles that the closer a document can be found to the event it describes the more credible it is. The time span for the biblical manuscript copies listed above are all within 350 years of the originals, some as early as 130-250 years and one even purporting to coexist with the original (i.e. the Magdalene Manuscript fragments of Matthew 26), while the time span for the secular manuscript copies are much greater, between 750-1,400 years! This indeed gives enormous authority to the biblical manuscript copies, as no other ancient piece of literature can make such close time comparisons.

Because of its importance to our discussion here a special note needs to be given to the Magdalene Manuscript mentioned above. Until two years ago, the oldest assumed manuscript which we possessed was the St. John papyrus (P52), housed in the John Rylands museum in Manchester, and dated at 120 AD (Time April 26, 1996, pg.8). Thus, it was thought that the earliest New Testament manuscript could not be corroborated by eyewitnesses to the events. That assumption has now changed, for three even older manuscripts, one each from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke have now been dated earlier than the Johannine account. It is two of these three findings which I believe will completely change the entire focus of the critical debate on the authenticity of the Bible. Let me explain.

The Lukan papyrus, situated in a library in Paris has been dated to the late 1st century or early 2nd century, so it predates the John papyrus by 20-30 years (Time April 26, 1996, pg.8). But of more importance are the manuscript findings of Mark and Matthew! New research which has now been uncovered by Dr. Carsten Thiede, and is published in his newly released book on the subject, the Jesus Papyrus mentions a fragment from the book of Mark found among the Qumran scrolls (fragment 7Q5) showing that it was written sometime before 68 AD. It is important to remember that Christ died in 33 AD, so this manuscript could have been written, at the latest, within 35 years of His death; possibly earlier, and thus during the time that the eyewitnesses to that event were still alive!

The most significant find, however, is a manuscript fragment from the book of Matthew (chapt.26) called the **Magdalene Manuscript** which has been analysed by Dr. Carsten Thiede, and also written up in his book The Jesus Papyrus. Using a sophisticated analysis of the handwriting of the fragment by employing a special state-of-the-art microscope, he differentiated between 20 separate micrometer layers of the papyrus, measuring the height and depth of the ink as well as the angle of the stylus used by the scribe. After this analysis Thiede was able to compare it with other papyri from that period; notably manuscripts found at **Qumran** (dated to 58 AD), another at **Herculaneum** (dated prior to 79 AD), a further one from the fortress of **Masada** (dated to between 73/74 AD), and finally a papyrus from the Egyptian town of **Oxyrynchus**. The Magdalene Manuscript fragments matches all four, and in fact is almost a twin to the papyrus found in Oxyrynchus, which bears the date of 65/66 AD. Thiede concludes that these papyrus fragments of St. Matthew's Gospel were written no later than this date and probably earlier. That suggests that we either have a portion of the original gospel of Matthew, or an immediate copy which was written while Matthew and the other disciples and eyewitnesses to the events were still alive. This would be the oldest manuscript portion of our Bible in existence today, one which co-exists with the original writers!

What is of even more importance is what it says. The Matthew 26 fragment uses in its text *nomina sacra* (holy names) such as the diminutive "IS" for Jesus and "KE" for Kurie or Lord (The Times, Saturday, December 24, 1994). This is highly significant for our discussion today, because it suggests that the godhead of Jesus was recognised centuries before it was accepted as official church doctrine at the council of Nicea in 325 AD. There is still ongoing discussion concerning the exact dating of this manuscript. However, if the dates prove to be correct then this document alone completely eradicates the criticism levelled against the gospel accounts (such as the "Jesus Seminar") that the early disciples knew nothing about Christ's divinity, and that this concept was a later redaction imposed by the Christian community in the second century (AD).

We have other manuscript evidence for the New Testament as well:

(3) Versions or Translations:

Besides the 24,000 manuscripts, 230 of which predate the seventh century, we have more than **15,000** existing copies of the various versions written in the **Latin** and **Syriac** (Christian Aramaic), some of which were written as early as 150 AD, such as the Syriac Peshitta (150-250 AD) (McDowell 1972:49; 1990:47).

Because Christianity was a missionary faith from its very inception (Matthew 28:19-20), the scriptures

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were immediately translated into the known languages of that period. For that reason other written translations appeared soon after, such as **Coptic** translations (early 3rd and 4th centuries), **Armenian** (400 AD), **Gothic** (4th century), **Georgian** (5th century), **Ethiopic** (6th century), and **Nubian** (6th century) (McDowell 1972:48-50). The fact that we have so many translations of the New Testament points to its authenticity, as it would have been almost impossible, had the disciples or later followers wanted to corrupt or forge its contents, for them to have amassed all of the translations from the outlying areas and changed each one so that there would have been the uniformity which we find witnessed in these translations today.

(4) Lectionaries:

The practice of reading passages from the New Testament books at worship services began from the 6th century, so that today we have **2,135** lectionaries which have been catalogued from this period (McDowell 1972:52). If there had been a forgery, they too would have all had to have been changed.

(5) Early Church Father's Letters:

But possibly the greatest attestation for the authority of our New Testament are the masses of quotations taken from its pages by the early church fathers. Dean Burgon in his research found in all **86,489** quotes from the early church fathers (McDowell 1990:47-48; 1991:52). In fact, there are **32,000** quotations from the New Testament found in writings from before the council of Nicea in 325 AD (McDowell Evidence, 1972:52). J. Harold Greenlee points out that the quotations of the scripture in the works of the early church writers are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament manuscripts.

Sir David Dalrymple sought to do this, and from the second and third century writings of the church fathers he found the **entire New Testament quoted except for eleven verses** (McDowell 1972:50-51; 1990:48)! Thus, we could throw the New Testament manuscripts away and still reconstruct it with the simple help of these letters. Some examples of these are (from McDowell's Evidence..., 1972 pg. 51):

Clement (30- 95 AD) quotes from various sections of the New Testament.

Ignatius (70-110 AD) knew the apostles and quoted directly from 15 of the 27 books.

Polycarp (70-156 AD) was a disciple of John and quoted from the New Testament.

Thus the manuscript evidence at our disposal today gives us over 24,000 extent manuscripts portions with which to corroborate our current New Testament, hundreds of which were compiled long before Islam came onto the scene. The earliest of these manuscripts fragments have now been dated earlier than 60-70 AD, so within the lifetime of the original writers, and with an outside possibility that they are the originals themselves. On top of that we have 15,000 early translations of the New Testament, and over 2,000 lectionaries. And finally we have scriptural quotations in the letters of the early Church fathers with which we could almost reproduce the New Testament if we so wished. This indeed is substantial manuscript evidence for the New Testament. But there is more:

(6) Eyewitness accounts:

We also have many internal eyewitnesses (other Christians, who had accompanied Jesus during His ministry) who were still alive during the time these books were written. They would have remembered what had or had not happened. Thus, any of the claims could have been corroborated or refuted by those to whom the books were addressed. Furthermore there would have been no reason for them to fabricate their accounts, since they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose were they to do so. Almost every New Testament writer (excluding John) was martyred for what they believed and wrote. Certainly they would not have chosen the ultimate price, their lives, to perpetuate a lie. The fact that they were all prepared to pay such a high price proves the accuracy of their accounts. Indeed, the writers knew they would be held accountable, and even allude to this in their writings. Take the example of Luke:

Luke 1:1-3= "...to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order." Luke is referring here to the disciples, those who accompanied Jesus, and knew better than anyone what He said and did.

Acts 2:22= "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know..." Here Luke refers to those living in Israel, the Jews, who would have been the first to find error in what he said, as they had little love for the rabbi they called 'the Christ'.

Acts 26:24-26= "...Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter the words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.'" Finally Luke

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(quoting Paul) points to a secular Roman official and a Jewish king as witnesses to what had been said and done.

Any one of these witnesses could have contradicted that which was being written, and that is why Luke refers to them, challenging them to remember what they themselves had seen and heard. Nothing he wrote could escape their notice, for “nothing had been done in a corner.” (see also: Luke 3:1, John 19:35, II Peter 1:16; I John 1:3)

(7) Hostile Accounts:

Along with the eyewitnesses of the disciples, there were others who would have been delighted to find a fault with the New Testament writers. These were the enemies of Christianity, the Jewish and Roman authorities who sought to destroy the work of Jesus while He was still alive. Yet, what is interesting is that these enemies of Christianity did not so much try to contradict the claims of the early Christians about such events as, for example, the resurrection, as they instead tried to offer other explanations for the events. Take for example the account in Matthew 28:12-15 of the Jewish leaders once they had heard that the body of Jesus had disappeared:

When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Had Jesus not risen from the dead, there certainly would have been overwhelming testimony to that effect. Indeed, as we have seen in the last section with Paul arguing before the Roman governor Festus (Acts 26:24-26), the early Christians sometimes appealed to the knowledge of current events of their hearers in making their case for Christianity.

There were also secular historians present who were recording what took place, who were Jewish and Greek. If anyone would have rejected what was being written, they would have been the first, as the Christians were not members of their community, and, in some cases, were even detested by the others. We have the historical accounts of a number of them:

1) **Thallus**, a Greek historian who (as quoted by Julius Africanus) wrote in 52 AD of the crucifixion, even mentioning that the day suddenly turned dark (McDowell 1990:201).

2) **Tacitus** a Roman historian who wrote The Annals of Imperial Rome, between 80-84 AD, mentions the death of Christ, maintaining that it happened during the reign of Tiberius'. But that was not all, because he specifies that it was by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, echoing the Gospel account exactly (McDowell 1990:200).

3) **Josephus** a Jewish historian, living in Rome, who wrote towards the end of the century (90-95 AD) not only of the death of Jesus, and of the martyrdom of the Jesus' brother, James, but mentions the martyrdom of John the Baptist as well. He also refers to the resurrection three days later, but in a document whose reliability is hotly contested (McDowell 1990:199).

4) **Suetonius**, the historian, in his The Twelve Caesars, mentions the expulsion from Rome of the followers of Crestus (a latin reference to Christ), by the emperor Claudius, which is referred to in Acts 18:2 (Suetonius, 1989:202).

4) **Pliny the Younger**, a Roman author and administrator who wrote in 112 AD of the Christian community in Asia Minor, and of their devotion to Christ (McDowell 1990:200).

All of these historians wrote of events which we find in the Bible, particularly pointing to the crucifixion, a historical fact denied by the Qur'an (sura 4:157). Though hostile, these accounts, nonetheless, corroborate that which we find in the gospels and in the letters of Paul.

The fact that the New Testament writers dared to write about all they had seen and heard, knowing full well that both friendly and hostile witnesses would follow their every word makes it reasonable to believe the veracity of their testimony.

So what comparisons are there between the manuscript evidence for the Qur'an and the Bible? We know from the historical record that by the end of the seventh century the Arabs had expanded right across North Africa and up into Spain, and east as far as India. The Qur'an (according to later Islamic tradition) was the centrepiece of their faith and practice at that time. Certainly within that enormous sphere of influence there should therefore be some complete Qur'anic manuscripts which still exist till this day. Yet, there is nothing from that period at all. The only manuscripts which Islam provides turn out to have been compiled in the ninth

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century, while the earliest corroborated manuscript is dated 790 AD, written not 1400 years ago as Muslims claim but a mere 1,200 years ago.

While Christianity can claim more than 5,300 extent Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, 10,000 Latin Vulgates and at least 9,300 other early versions, adding up to over 24,000 corroborated New Testament manuscripts still in existence (McDowell 1990:43-55), 230 of which were written between 25-600 years after the death of Christ (or between the 1st and 7th centuries) (McDowell 1972:39-49; Aland 1987:82-83), Islam cannot provide a single manuscript until well into the eighth century (Lings & Safadi 1976:17; Schimmel 1984:4-6). If the early Christians could retain so many hundreds of ancient manuscripts, written long before the Qur'an, at a time when paper had not yet been introduced, forcing the dependency on papyrus which disintegrated with age, then one wonders why the Muslims are not able to forward a single complete manuscript from this much later period, during which the Qur'an was supposedly revealed? This indeed gives the Bible a much stronger claim for reliability than that of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, while the earliest New Testament manuscripts as well as the earliest letters from the church fathers correspond with the New Testament which we have in our hands, providing us with some certainty that they have not been unduly added to or tampered with, the Qur'anic material which we have in our possession abounds with stories whose origins we can now trace to second century Jewish and Christian apocryphal literature. We know in some cases who wrote them, when exactly they were written and at times even why they were written; and that none of them were from a divine source, as they were written by the most human of Rabbis and storytellers over the intervening centuries after the Bible had been canonized.

We now turn our attention to the documentary evidence for both the Qur'an and the Bible.

[III] DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

[A] THE QUR'AN'S DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Documentary evidence for the Qur'an has always been difficult, due to the paucity of primary documents at our disposal (as was mentioned in the previous section). The oldest Muslim documents available are the Muslim Traditions, which were initially compiled as late as 765 AD (i.e. The *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq). Yet the earliest documents which we can refer to today are those compiled by Ibn Hisham (the *Sira* of the prophet), and the large *Hadith* compilations of al-Bukhari, Muslim and others, all written in the ninth century, and thus 200 to 250 years after the fact. They are much too late to be useful for our study here. Therefore we must go back to the seventh century itself and ascertain what documents are available with which we can corroborate the reliability of the Qur'an.

(1) *Doctrina Iacobi* and 661 Chronicler:

Two seventh century documents at our disposal are helpful here: a) the *Doctrina Iacobi*, the earliest testimony of Muhammad and of his "movement" available to us outside Islamic tradition; a Greek antiJewish tract which was written in Palestine between 634 and 640 AD (Brock 1982:9; CroneCook 1977:3), and b) a chronicle supposedly written by Sebeos in 660 AD. Both of these documents deal with the relationship between the Arab's and Jews in the seventh century.

The Qur'an implies that Muhammad severed his relationship with the Jews in 624 AD (or soon after the *Hijra* in 622 AD), and thus moved the direction of prayer, the *Qibla* at that time from Jerusalem to Mecca (Sura 2:144, 149:150). The early nonMuslim sources, however, depict a good relationship between the Muslims and Jews at the time of the first conquests (late 620s AD), and even later. Yet the *Doctrina Iacobi* warns of the 'Jews who mix with the *Saracens*,' and the danger to 'life and limb of falling into the hands of these Jews and *Saracens*' (Bonwetsch 1910:88; Cook 1983:75). In fact, this relationship seems to carry right on into the conquest as an early Armenian source mentions that the governor of Jerusalem in the aftermath of the conquest was a Jew (Patkanean 1879:111; Sebeos 1904:103).

What is significant here is the possibility that Jews and Arabs (*Saracens*) seem to be allies during the time of the conquest of Palestine and for a short time after (CroneCook 1977:6).

If these witnesses are correct then one must ask how it is that the Jews and *Saracens* (Arabs) are allies as late as 640 AD, when, according to the Qur'an, Muhammad severed his ties with the Jews as early as 624 AD, more than 15 years earlier?

To answer that we need to refer to the earliest connected account of the career of the 'prophet,' that

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given in an Armenian chronicle from around 660 AD, which is ascribed by some to Bishop Sebeos (Sebeos 1904:9496; CroneCook 1977:6). The chronicler describes how Muhammad established a community which comprised both *Ishmaelites* (i.e. Arabs) and Jews, and that their common platform was their common descent from Abraham; the Arabs via Ishmael, and the Jews via Isaac (Sebeos 1904:9496; CroneCook 1977:8; Cook 1983:75). The chronicler believed Muhammad had endowed both communities with a birthright to the Holy Land, while simultaneously providing them with a monotheist genealogy (CroneCook 1977:8). This is not without precedent as the idea of an *Ishmaelite* birthright to the Holy Land was discussed and rejected earlier in the Genesis Rabbah (61:7), in the Babylonian Talmud and in the Book of Jubilees (CroneCook 1977:159).

Here we find a number of non-Muslim documentary sources contradicting the Qur'an, maintaining that there was a good relationship between the Arabs and Jews for at least a further 15 years beyond that which the Qur'an asserts.

If Palestine was the focus for the Arabs, then the city of Mecca comes into question, and further documentary data concerning Mecca may prove to be the most damaging evidence against the reliability of the Qur'an which we have to date.

(2) Mecca:

To begin with we must ask what we know about Mecca? Muslims maintain that "Mecca is the centre of Islam, and the centre of history." According to the Qur'an, "The first sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at *Bakkah* (or Mecca), a blessed place, a guidance for the peoples." (Sura 3:96) In Sura 6:92 and 42:5 we find that Mecca is described as the "mother of all settlements." According to Muslim tradition, Adam placed the black stone in the original *Ka'ba* there, while according to the Qur'an (Sura 2:125-127) it was Abraham and Ishmael who rebuilt the Meccan *Ka'ba* many years later. Thus, by implication, Mecca is considered by Muslims to be the first and most important city in the world! In fact much of the story of Muhammad revolves around Mecca, as his formative years were spent there, and it was to Mecca that he sought to return while in exile in Medina.

Apart from the obvious difficulty in finding any documentary or archaeological evidence that Abraham ever went to or lived in Mecca, the overriding problem rests in finding any reference to the city before the creation of Islam. From research carried out by both Crone and Cook, except for an inference to a city called "*Makoraba*" by the GrecoEgyptian geographer Ptolemy in the mid-2nd century AD (though we are not even sure whether this allusion by Ptolemy referred to Mecca, as he only mentioned the name in passing), there is absolutely no other report of Mecca or its *Ka'ba* in any authenticated ancient document; that is until the early eighth century (Cook 1983:74; CroneCook 1977:22). As Crone and Cook maintain the earliest substantiated reference to Mecca occurs in the Continuatio Byzantia Arabica, which is a source dating from early in the reign of the caliph Hisham, who ruled between 724-743 AD (CroneCook 1977:22,171).

Therefore, the earliest corroborative evidence we have for the existence of Mecca is fully 100 years after the date when Islamic tradition and the Qur'an place it. Why? Certainly, if it was so important a city, someone, somewhere would have mentioned it; yet we find nothing outside of the small inference by Ptolemy 500 years earlier, and these initial statements in the early eighth century.

Yet even more troubling historically is the claim by Muslims that Mecca was not only an ancient and great city, but it was also the centre of the trading routes for Arabia in the seventh century and before (Cook 1983:74; Crone 1987:36). It is this belief which is the easiest to examine, since we have ample documentation from that part of the world with which to check out its veracity.

According to extensive research by Bulliet on the history of trade in the ancient Middle East, these claims by Muslims are quite wrong, as Mecca simply was not on any major trading routes. The reason for this, he contends, is that, "Mecca is tucked away at the edge of the peninsula. Only by the most tortured map reading can it be described as a natural crossroads between a north-south route and an east-west one." (Bulliet 1975:105)

This is corroborated by further research carried out by Groom and Muller, who contend that Mecca simply could not have been on the trading route, as it would have entailed a detour from the natural route along the western ridge. In fact, they maintain the trade route must have bypassed Mecca by some one hundred miles (Groom 1981:193; Muller 1978:723).

Patricia Crone, in her work on Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam adds a practical reason which is too often overlooked by earlier historians. She points out that, "Mecca was a barren place, and barren places do not make natural halts, and least of all when they are found at a short distance from famously green environments. Why should caravans have made a steep descent to the barren valley of Mecca when they could have stopped at *Ta'if*. Mecca did, of course, have both a well and a sanctuary, but so did *Ta'if*, which had food supplies, too" (Crone 1987:67; CroneCook 1977:22).

Furthermore, Patricia Crone asks, "what commodity was available in Arabia that could be transported

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such a distance, through such an inhospitable environment, and still be sold at a profit large enough to support the growth of a city in a peripheral site bereft of natural resources?" (Crone 1987:7) It wasn't incense, spices, and other exotic goods, as many notoriously unreliable earlier writers have intimated (see Crone's discussion on the problem of historical accuracy, particularly between Lammens, Watts and Kister, in Meccan Trade 1987:3). According to the latest and much more reliable research by Kister and Sprenger, the Arabs engaged in a trade of a considerably humbler kind, that of leather and clothing; hardly items which could have founded a commercial empire of international dimensions (Kister 1965:116; Sprenger 1869:94).

The real problem with Mecca, however, is that there simply was no international trade taking place in Arabia, let alone in Mecca in the centuries immediately prior to Muhammad's birth. It seems that much of our data in this area has been spurious from the outset, due to sloppy research of the original sources, carried out by Lammens, "an unreliable scholar," and repeated by the great orientalists such as Watts, Shaban, Rodinson, Hitti, Lewis and Shahid (Crone 1987:3,6). Lammens, using first century sources (such as **Periplus** and **Pliny**) should have used the later Greek historians who were closer to the events (such as **Cosmas**, **Procopius** and **Theodoretus**) (Crone 1987:3,19-22,44).

Had he referred to the later historians he would have found that the Greek trade between India and the Mediterranean was entirely maritime after the first century AD (Crone 1987:29). One need only look at a map to understand why. It made little sense to ship goods across such distances by land when a water-way was available close by. Patricia Crone points out that in Diocletian's Rome it was cheaper to ship wheat 1,250 miles by sea than to transport it fifty miles by land (Crone 1987:7). The distance from *Najran*, Yemen in the south, to *Gaza* in the north was roughly 1,250 miles. Why would the traders ship their goods from India by sea, and unload it at Aden where it would be put on the backs of much slower and more expensive camels to trudge 1,250 miles across the inhospitable Arabian desert to Gaza, when they could simply have left it on the ships and followed the Red Sea route up the west coast of Arabia?

There were other problems as well. Had Lammens researched his sources correctly he would have also found that the Greco-Roman trade with India collapsed by the third century AD, so that by Muhammad's time there was not only no overland route, but no Roman market to which the trade was destined (Crone 1987:29). He would have similarly found that what trade remained, was controlled by the Ethiopians and not the Arabs, and that *Adulis*, the port city on the Ethiopian coast of the Red Sea, and not Mecca was the trading centre of that region (Crone 1987:11,41-42).

Of even more significance, had Lammens taken the time to study the early Greek sources, he would have discovered that the Greeks to whom the trade went had never even heard of a place called Mecca (Crone 1987:11,41-42). If, according to the Muslim traditions, and recent orientalists, Mecca was so important, certainly those to whom the trade was going would have noted its existence. Yet, we find nothing. Crone in her work points out that the Greek trading documents refer to the towns of *Ta'if* (which is south-east and close to present-day Mecca), and to *Yathrib* (later Medina), as well as *Kaybar* in the north, but no mention is made of Mecca (Crone 1987:11). That indeed is troubling for the historicity of a city whose importance lies at the centre of the nascent Islam.

Had the later orientalists bothered to check out Lammens' sources, they too would have realised that since the overland route was not used after the first century AD, it certainly was not in use in the fifth or sixth centuries (Crone 1987:42), and much of what has been written concerning Mecca would have been corrected long before now.

Finally, the problem of locating Mecca in the early secular sources is not unique, for there is even some confusion within Islamic tradition as to where exactly Mecca was initially situated (see the discussion on the evolution of the Meccan site in Crone & Cook's Hagarism 1977:23,173). According to research carried out by J. van Ess, in both the first and second civil wars, there are accounts of people proceeding from Medina to Iraq via Mecca (van Ess 1971:16; see also Muhammad b. Ahmad alDhahabi 1369:343). Yet Mecca is southwest of Medina, and Iraq is northeast. Thus the sanctuary for Islam, according to these traditions was at one time north of Medina, which is the opposite direction from where Mecca is today!

We are left in a quandary. If, according to documentary evidence, in this case the ancient Greek historical and trading documents, Mecca was not the great commercial centre the later Muslim traditions would have us believe, if it was not known by the people who lived and wrote from that period, and if it could not even qualify as a viable city during the time of Muhammad, it certainly could not have been the centre of the Muslim world at that time. How then can we believe that the Qur'an is reliable? The documentary evidence not only contradicts its dating on the split between the Arabs and the Jews, but the city it identifies as the birthplace and cornerstone for the nascent Islam cannot even be identified with any historical accuracy until at least a full century later? Do these same problems exist with the Bible?

[B] THE BIBLE'S DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE:

(1900=Abraham, 1700=Joseph, 1447=Moses, 1000=David)

The documentary evidence for the reliability of the Bible has been an area of research which has been increasing rapidly over the last few decades. But this hasn't always been so. The assumption by many former archaeologists was that the Old Testament was written not in the tenth to fourteenth centuries B.C. by the authors described within its text, but by later Jewish historians during the much later second to sixth century B.C., and that the stories were then redacted back onto the great prophets such as Moses and David, etc... Yet, with the enormous quantity of data which has been uncovered and is continuing to be uncovered, as well as the new forensic research methods being employed to study them, what we are now finding is that many of these preconceived notions of authorship are simply no longer valid. For instance:

(1) The sceptics contended that the **Pentateuch** could not have been written by Moses, because there was no evidence of any writing that early. Then the Black Stele was found with the detailed laws of *Hammurabi* which were written 300 years before Moses, and in the same region.

(2) There was much doubt as to the reliability of the Old Testament documents, since the oldest manuscript in our possession was the Massoretic Text, written in 916 AD. How, the sceptics asked, can we depend on a set of writings whose earliest manuscripts are so recent? Then came the amazing discoveries of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** written around 125 B.C. These scrolls show us that outside of minute copying errors it is identical to the Massoretic Text and yet it predates it by over 1,000 years! We have further corroboration in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text, translated around 150-200 B.C.

Yet to please the sceptics, the best documentary evidence for the reliability of the Biblical text must come from documents external to the Biblical text themselves. There has always been doubt concerning the stories of Abraham and the Patriarchs found in the books attributed to Moses, the Pentateuch. The sceptics maintained that there is no method of ascertaining their reliability since we have no corroboration from external secular accounts. This has all changed; for instance:

(3) Discoveries from excavations at *Nuzu, Mari and Assyrian, Hittite, Sumerian and Eshunna Codes* point out that Hebrew poetry, Mosaic legislation as well as the Hebrew social customs all fit the period and region of the patriarchs.

(4) According to the historians there were no **Hittites** at the time of Abraham, thus the historicity of the Biblical accounts describing them was questionable. Now we know from inscriptions of that period that there was 1,200 years of Hittite civilization, much of it corresponding with the Patriarchal period.

(5) Historians also told us that no such people as the **Horites** existed. It is these people whom we find mentioned in the genealogy of Esau in Genesis 36:20. Yet now they have been discovered as a group of warriors also living in Mesopotamia during the Patriarchal period.

(6) The account of **Daniel**, according to the sceptical historians, must have been written in the second century and not the sixth century B.C. because of all the precise historical detail found in its content. Yet now the sixth century's East India Inscription corresponds with the Daniel 4:30 account of Nebuchadnezzar's building, proving that the author of Daniel must have been an eye-witness from that period. Either way it is amazing.

The strongest case for extra-Biblical corroboration of the Patriarchal period are found in four sets of tablets which have been and are continuing to be uncovered from that area of the world. They demonstrate that the Biblical account is indeed historically reliable. Let's briefly look at all four sets of tablets.

(7) ***Armana tablets:** (from Egypt) mention the *Habiru* or *Apiru* in Hebrew, which was first applied to Abraham in Genesis 14:13.

(8) ***Ebla tablets:** 17,000 tablets from *Tell Mardikh* (Northern Syria), dating from 2300 B.C., shows us that a thousand years before Moses, laws, customs and events were recorded in writing in that part of the world, and that the judicial proceedings and case laws were very similar to the Deuteronomy law code (i.e. Deuteronomy 22:22-30 codes on punishment for sex offenses). One tablet mentions and lists the five cities of *Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim* and *Zoar* in the exact sequence which we find in Genesis 14:8! Until these tablets were uncovered the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah had always been in doubt by historians.

(9) ***Mari tablets:** (from the Euphrates) mentions king *Arriyuk*, or *Arioch* of Genesis 14, and lists the towns of *Nahor* and *Harran* (from Genesis 24:10), as well as the names Benjamin and *Habiru*.

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(10) ***Nuzi tablets:** (from Iraq) speaks about a number of customs which we find in the Pentateuch, such as:

- a) a barren wife giving a handmaiden to her husband (i.e. Hagar)
- b) a bride chosen for the son by the father (i.e. Rebekah)
- c) a dowry paid to the father-in-law (i.e. Jacob)
- d) work done to pay a dowry (i.e. Jacob)
- e) the unchanging oral will of a father (i.e. Isaac)
- f) a father giving his daughter a slave-girl (i.e. Leah, Rachel)
- g) the sentence of death for stealing a cult gods (i.e. Jacob).

Because of these extra-Biblical discoveries many of the historians are now changing their view. Thus Joseph Free states: "New discoveries now show us that a host of supposed [Biblical] errors and contradictions are not errors at all: 'such as, that *Sargon* existed and lived in a palatial dwelling 12 miles north of *Ninevah*, that the *Hittites* were a significant people, that the concept of a sevenfold lamp existed in the early Iron Age, that a significant city given in the record of David's empire lies far to the north, and that *Belshazzar* existed and ruled over Babylon."

While documentary evidence for the Bible in the form of secular inscriptions and tablets not only corroborate the existence of some of the oldest Biblical traditions, similar and more recent documentary evidence (such as the *Doctrina Iacobi*, and the Armenian Chronicler) eradicates some of the more cherished Islamic traditions, that Islam was a uniquely Arab creation, and that Mecca, the supposed centre for Islam has little historicity whatsoever before or during the time of Muhammad.

We look forward to further documentary discoveries coming to light, as they continue to substantiate and underline the Biblical record, while simultaneously putting doubt to the record of the Qur'an. Let's now look at the archaeological evidence for both the Bible and the Qur'an:

[III] THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

If we are to take the Qur'anic and Biblical records seriously, we will need to inquire further as to whether there are other sources which we can turn to for a corroboration of their accounts. Since we are dealing with scriptures which often speak of history, probably the best and easiest way to confirm that history is to go to the areas where the history took place because history never takes place in a vacuum. It always leaves behind its forgotten fingerprints, waiting dormant in the ground to be discovered, dug up and deciphered. It is therefore, important that we also get our didgets dirty and take a look at the treasures which our archaeologist friends are discovering to ascertain if they have been able to reward us with any clues as to the authenticity of both the Qur'anic and Biblical accounts. Let's see what archaeology tells us concerning the Qur'an.

[A] THE QUR'AN'S ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE:

As with the manuscript and documentary evidence, there is not much archaeological data to which we can turn to for corroboration of the Qur'an. What we can do, however, is look at the claims the Qur'an makes and ascertain whether they can be backed up by archaeology. Let's start with the Qibla, or direction of prayer.

(1) The Qibla:

According to the Qur'an, the direction of prayer (the *Qibla*), was canonized (or finalized) towards Mecca for all Muslims in or around 624 AD (see Sura 2:144, 149-150).

Yet, the earliest evidence from outside Muslim tradition regarding the direction in which Muslims prayed, and by implication the location of their sanctuary, points to an area much further north than Mecca, in fact somewhere in northwest Arabia (CroneCook 1977:23). Consider the archaeological evidence which has been and is continuing to be uncovered from the first mosques built in the seventh century:

According to archaeological research carried out by Creswell and Fehervari on ancient mosques in the Middle East, two floorplans from two Umayyad mosques in Iraq, one built at the beginning of the 8th century by the governor Hajjaj in *Wasit* (noted by Creswell as, "the oldest mosque in Islam of which remains have come down to us" - Creswell 1989:41), and the other attributed to roughly the same period near *Baghdad*, have *Qiblas* (the direction which these mosques are facing) which do not face Mecca, but are oriented too far north (Creswell 1969:137ff & 1989:40; Fehervari 1961:89; CroneCook 1977:23,173). The *Wasit* mosque is off by 33 degrees, and the Baghdad mosque is off by 30 degrees (Creswell 1969:137ff; Fehervari 1961:89).

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This agrees with Baladhuri's testimony (called the Futuh) that the *Qibla* of the first mosque in *Kufa*, Iraq, supposedly constructed in 670 AD (Creswell 1989:41), also lay to the west, when it should have pointed almost directly south (alBaladhuri's Futuh, ed. by de Goeje 1866:276; Crone 1980:12; CroneCook 1977:23,173).

The original ground-plan of the mosque of 'Amr b. al 'As, located in *Fustat*, the garrison town outside Cairo, Egypt shows that the *Qibla* again pointed too far north and had to be corrected later under the governorship of Qurra b. Sharik (Creswell 1969:37,150). Interestingly this agrees with the later Islamic tradition compiled by Ahmad b. alMaqrizi that 'Amr prayed facing slightly south of east, and not towards the south (alMaqrizi 1326:6; Crone-Cook 1977:24,173).

If you take a map you will find where it is that these mosques were pointing. All four of the above instances position the *Qibla* not towards Mecca, but much further north, in fact closer possibly to the vicinity of Jerusalem. If, as some Muslims now say, one should not take these findings too seriously as many mosques even today have misdirected Qiblas, then one must wonder why, if the Muslims back then were so incapable of ascertaining directions, they should all happen to be pointing to a singular location; to an area in northern Arabia, and possibly Jerusalem?

We find further corroboration for this direction of prayer by the Christian writer and traveller Jacob of Edessa, who, writing as late as 705 AD was a contemporary eyewitness in Egypt. He maintained that the 'Mahgraye' (Greek name for Arabs) in Egypt prayed facing east which was towards their *Ka'ba* (CroneCook 1977:24). His letter (which can be found in the British Museum) is indeed revealing. Therefore, as late as 705 AD the direction of prayer towards Mecca had not yet been canonized.

Note: The mention of a *Ka'ba* does not necessarily infer Mecca (as so many Muslims have been quick to point out), since there were other *Ka'bas* in existence during that time, usually in market-towns (Crone-Cook 1977:25,175). It was profitable to build a *Ka'ba* in these market towns so that the people coming to market could also do their pilgrimage or penitence to the idols contained within. The *Ka'ba* Jacob of Edessa was referring to was situated at "the patriarchal places of their races," which he also maintains was not in the south. Both the Jews and Arabs ('Mahgraye') maintained a common descent from Abraham who was known to have lived and died in Palestine, as has been corroborated by recent archaeological discoveries (see the earlier discussion on the Ebla, Mari and Nuzi tablets, as well as extra-Biblical 10th century references to Abraham in McDowell 1991:98-104). This common descent from Abraham is also corroborated by the Armenian Chronicler, Sebeos, as early as 660 AD (Sebeos 1904:9496; CroneCook 1977:8; Cook 1983:75).

According to Dr. Hawting, who teaches on the sources of Islam at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, a part of the University of London), new archaeological discoveries of mosques in Egypt from the early 700s also show that up till that time the Muslims (or *Haggarenes*) were indeed praying, not towards Mecca, but towards the north, and possibly Jerusalem. In fact, Dr. Hawting maintains, no mosques have been found from this period (the seventh century) which face towards Mecca (noted from his class lectures in 1995). Hawting cautions, however, that not all of the *Qiblas* face towards Jerusalem. Some Jordanian mosques have been uncovered which face north, while there are certain North African mosques which face south, implying that there was some confusion as to where the early sanctuary was placed. Yet, the Qur'an tells us (in sura 2) that the direction of the *Qibla* was fixed towards Mecca by approximately two years after the Hijra, or around 624 AD, and has remained in that direction until the present!

Thus, according to Crone and Cook and Hawting, the combination of the archaeological evidence from Iraq along with the literary evidence from Egypt points unambiguously to a sanctuary [and thus direction of prayer] not in the south, but somewhere in northwest Arabia (or even further north) at least till the end of the seventh century (CroneCook 1977:24).

What is happening here? Why are the *Qiblas* of these early mosques not facing towards Mecca? Why the discrepancy between the Qur'an and that which archaeology as well as documents reveal as late as 705 AD?

Some Muslims argue that perhaps the early Muslims did not know the direction of Mecca. Yet these were desert traders, caravaneers! Their livelihood was dependant on travelling the desert, which has few landmarks, and, because of the sandstorms, no roads. They, above all, knew how to follow the stars. Their lives depended on it. Certainly they knew the difference between the north and the south.

Furthermore, the mosques in Iraq and Egypt were built in civilized urban areas, amongst a sophisticated people who were well adept at finding directions. It is highly unlikely that they would miscalculate their qiblas by so many degrees. How else did they perform the obligatory *Hajj*, which we are told was also canonized at this time? And why are so many of the mosques facing in the direction of northern Arabia, or possibly Jerusalem? A possible answer may be found by looking at archaeology once again; this time in Jerusalem itself.

(2) The Dome of the Rock:

In the centre of Jerusalem sits an imposing structure (even today) called the Dome of the Rock, built by 'Abd alMalik in 691 AD. One will note, however, that the Dome of the Rock is not a mosque, as it has no *Qibla* (no direction for prayer). It is built as an **octagon** with eight pillars (Nevo 1994:113), suggesting it was used for **circumambulation** (to walk around). Thus, it seems to have been built as a **sanctuary** (Glasse 1991:102). Today it is considered to be the third most holy site in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Muslims contend that it was built to commemorate the night when Muhammad went up to heaven to speak with Moses and Allah concerning the number of prayers required of the believers (known as the *Mi'raj* in Arabic) (Glasse 1991:102).

Yet, according to the research carried out on the inscriptions on the walls of the building by Van Berchem and Nevo, they say nothing of the *Mi'raj*, but state mere polemical quotations which are Qur'anic, though they are aimed primarily at Christians. The inscriptions attest the messianic status of Jesus, the acceptance of the prophets, Muhammad's receipt of revelation, and the use of the terms "islam" and "muslim" (Van Berchem 1927:nos.215,217; Nevo 1994:113). Why, if the Dome of the Rock were built to commemorate that momentous event, does it say nothing about it? Perhaps this building was built for other purposes than that of commemorating the *Mi'raj*. The fact that such an imposing structure was built so early suggests that this and not Mecca became the sanctuary and the centre of a nascent Islam up until at least the late seventh century, (Van Berchem 1927:217)!

From what we read earlier of Muhammad's intention to fulfill his and the Hagarene's birthright, by taking back the land of Abraham, or Palestine, it makes sense that the caliph 'Abd alMalik would build this structure as the centrepiece of that fulfilment. Is it no wonder then, that when 'Abd alMalik built the dome in which he proclaimed the prophetic mission of Muhammad, he placed it over the temple rock itself (Van Berchem 1927:217).

According to Islamic tradition, the caliph Suleyman, who reigned as late as 715/717 AD, went to Mecca to ask about the *Hajj*. He was not satisfied with the response he received there, and so chose to follow 'abd al-Malik (i.e. travelling to the Dome of the Rock) (note: not to be confused with the Imam, Malik b. Anas who, because he was born in 712 AD would have been only three years old at the time). This fact alone, according to Dr. Hawting at SOAS, points out that there was still some confusion as to where the sanctuary was to be located as late as the early eighth century. It seems that Mecca was only now (sixty years after the Muhammad's death) taking on the role as the religious centre of Islam. One can therefore understand why, according to tradition, Walid I, who reigned as Caliph between 705 and 715 AD, wrote to all the regions ordering the demolition and enlargement of the mosques (refer to 'Kitab al'uyun wa'lhada'iq,' edited by M. de Goeje and P. de Jong 1869:4). Could it be that at this time the Qiblas were then aligned towards Mecca? If so it points to a glaring contradiction to the Qur'an which established Mecca as the sanctuary and thus direction for prayer during the lifetime of Muhammad some eighty to ninety years earlier (see Sura 2:144-150).

And that is not all, for we have other archaeological and inscribed evidence which point up differences with that which we read in the Qur'an. Let's look at the reliability of Muhammad's prophethood, using the data at our disposal.

(3) Nevo's Rock inscriptions:

In order to know who Muhammad was, and what he did, we must go back to the time when he lived, and look at the evidence which existed then, and still exists, to see what it can tell us about this very important figure. Dr. Wansbrough, who has done so much research on the early traditions and the Qur'an believes that, because the Islamic sources are all very late, from 150 years for the *SiraMaghazi* documents, as well as the earliest Qur'an, it behoves us not to consider them authoritative (Wansbrough 1977:160-163; Rippin 1985:154-155). It is when we look at the non-Muslim sources that we find some rather interesting observances as to who this man Muhammad was.

The best non-Muslim sources on this period which we have are those provided by the Arabic rock inscriptions scattered all over the Syro-Jordanian deserts and the Peninsula, and especially the Negev desert (Nevo 1994:109). The man who has done the greatest research on these rock inscriptions is the late Yehuda Nevo, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It is to his research, which is titled Towards a Prehistory of Islam, published in 1994, that I will refer.

Nevo has found in the Arab religious texts, dating from the first century and a half of Arab rule (seventh to eighth century AD), a monotheistic creed. However, he contends that this creed "is demonstrably not Islam, but [a creed] from which Islam could have developed." (Nevo 1994:109)

Nevo also found that "in all the Arab religious institutions during the *Sufyani* period [661-684 AD] there is a complete absence of any reference to Muhammad." (Nevo 1994:109) In fact neither the name

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Muhammad himself nor any Muhammadan formulae (that he is the prophet of God) appears in any inscription dated before the year 691 AD. This is true whether the main purpose of the inscription is religious, such as in supplications, or whether it was used as a commemorative inscription, though including a religious emphasis, such as the inscription at the dam near the town of *Ta'if*, built by the Caliph Mu'awiya in the 660s AD (Nevo 1994:109).

The fact that Muhammad's name is absent on all of the early inscriptions, especially the religious ones is significant. Many of the later traditions (i.e. the *Sira* and the *Hadith*, which are the earliest Muslim literature that we possess) are made up almost entirely of narratives on the prophet's life. He is the example which all Muslims are to follow. Why then do we not find this same emphasis in these much earlier Arabic inscriptions which are closer to the time he lived? Even more troubling, why is there no mention of him at all? His name is only found on the Arab inscriptions after 690 AD (Nevo 1994:109-110).

And what's more, the first dated occurrence of the phrase *Muhammad rasul Allah* (Muhammad is the prophet of God) is found on an Arab Sassanian coin of Xalid b. 'Abdallah from the year 690 AD, which was struck in Damascus (Nevo 1994:110).

Of greater significance, the first occurrence of what Nevo calls the "Triple Confession of Faith," including the *Tawhid* (that God is one), the phrase, *Muhammad rasul Allah* (that Muhammad is his prophet), and the human nature of Jesus (*rasul Allah wa 'abduhu*), is found in 'Abd alMalik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, dated 691 AD (Nevo 1994:110)! Before this inscription the Muslim confession of faith cannot be attested at all.

As a rule, after 691 AD and on through the *Marwanid* dynasty (until 750 AD), Muhammad's name usually occurs whenever religious formulae are used, such as on coins, milestones, and papyrus "*protocols*" (Nevo 1994:110). One could probably argue that perhaps these late dates are due to the fact that any religious notions took time to penetrate the Arabic inscriptions. Yet, according to Nevo, the first Arabic papyrus, an Egyptian *entaqion*, which was a receipt for taxes paid, dated 642 AD and written in both Greek and Arabic is headed by the "*Basmala*," yet it is neither Christian nor Muslim in character (Nevo 1994:110).

The religious content within the rock inscriptions do not become pronounced until after 661 AD. However, though they bear religious texts, they never mention the prophet or the Muhammadan formulae (Nevo 1994:110). "This means," Nevo says, "that the official Arab religious confession did not include Muhammad or Muhammadan formulae in its repertoire of set phrases at this time," a full 30-60 years and more after the death of Muhammad (Nevo 1994:110). What they did contain was a monotheistic form of belief, belonging to a certain body of sectarian literature with developed Judaeo-Christian conceptions in a particular literary style, but one which contained no features specific to any known monotheistic religion (Nevo 1994:110,112).

Of even greater significance, these inscriptions show that when the Muhammadan formulae is introduced, during the *Marwanid* period (after 684 AD), it is carried out "almost overnight" (Nevo 1994:110). Suddenly it became the state's only form of official religious declaration, and was used exclusively in formal documents and inscriptions, such as the papyrus "*protocols*" (Nevo 1994:110).

Yet even after the Muhammadan texts became official, they were not accepted by the public quite so promptly. For years after their appearance in state declarations, people continued to include non-Muhammadan legends in personal inscriptions, as well as routine chancery writings (Nevo 1994:114). Thus, for instance, Nevo has found a certain scribe who does not use the Muhammadan formulae in his Arabic and Greek correspondence, though he does on papyrus "*protocols*" bearing his name and title (Nevo 1994:114).

In fact, according to Nevo, Muhammadan formulae only began to be used in the popular rock inscriptions of the central Negev around 30 years (or one generation) after its introduction by 'Abd alMalik, sometime during the reign of Caliph Hisham (between 724-743 AD). And even these, according to Nevo, though they are Muhammadan, are not Muslim. The Muslim texts, he believes, only begin to appear at the beginning of the ninth century (around 822 AD), coinciding with the first written Qur'ans, as well as the first written traditional Muslim accounts (Nevo 1994:115).

Thus, it seems from these inscriptions that it was during the later *Marwanid* period (after 684 AD), and not during the life of Muhammad that he was elevated to the position of a universal prophet, and that even then, the Muhammadan formula which was introduced was still not equivalent with that which we have today.

(4) The Qur'an:

We now come to the Qur'an itself. It seems evident that the Qur'an underwent a transformation during the 100 years following the prophet's death. We have now uncovered coins with supposed Qur'anic writings on them which date from 685 AD, coined during the reign of 'Abd alMalik (Nevo 1994:110). Furthermore, the Dome of the Rock sanctuary built by 'Abd alMalik in Jerusalem in 691 AD "does attest to the existence, at the end of the seventh century, of materials immediately recognizable as Koranic." (CroneCook 1977:18) Yet, the

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quotations from the Qur'an on both the coins and the Dome of the Rock differ in details from that which we find in the Qur'an today (Cook 1983:74). Van Berchem and Grohmann, two etymologists who have done extensive research on the Dome of the Rock inscriptions, maintain that the inscriptions contain "variant verbal forms, extensive deviances, as well as omissions from the text which we have today." (Cook 1983:74; CroneCook 1977:167168; see Van Berchem part two, vol.ii, nos.1927:215217 and Grohmann's Arabic Papyri from Hirbet elMird, no.72 to delineate where these variances are)

If these inscriptions had been derived from the Qur'an, with the variants which they contain, then how could the Qur'an have been canonized prior to this time (late seventh century)? One can only conclude that there must have been an evolution in the transmission of the Qur'an through the years (if indeed they were originally taken from the Qur'an).

The sources also seem to suggest that the Qur'an was put together rather hurriedly. This is underlined by Dr. John Wansbrough who maintains that, "the book is strikingly lacking in overall structure, frequently obscure and inconsequential in both language and content, perfunctory in its linking of disparate materials, and given to the repetition of whole passages in variant versions. On this basis it can plausibly be argued that the book is the product of the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions." (Hagarism, CroneCook 1977:18,167) Thus Crone and Cook believe that because of the imperfection of the editing, the emergence of the Qur'an must have been a sudden and late event (CroneCook 1977:18,167).

As to when that event took place we are not altogether sure, but we can make an educated guess. From the earlier discussion concerning the dating of the earliest manuscripts we can conclude that there was no Qur'anic documentation in existence in the mid-late seventh century. The earliest reference from outside Islamic literary traditions to the book called the "Qur'an" occurs in the mideighth century between an Arab and a monk of *Bet Hale* (Nau 1915:6f), but no one knows whether it may have differed considerably in content from the Qur'an which we have today. Both Crone and Cook conclude that except for this small reference there is no indication of the existence of the Qur'an before the end of the seventh century (CroneCook 1977:18).

Crone and Cook in their research go on to maintain that it was under the governor *Hajjaj* of Iraq in 705 AD that we have a logical historical context in which the "Qur'an" (or a nascent body of literature which would later become the Qur'an) could have been compiled as Muhammad's scripture (CroneCook 1977:18). In an account attributed to Leo by Levond, the governor *Hajjaj* is shown to have collected all the old Hagarene writings and replaced them with others "according to his own taste, and disseminated them everywhere among [his] nation." (Jeffrey 1944:298) A reasonable conclusion is that it was during this period that the Qur'an began its evolution, possibly beginning to be written down, until it was finally canonized in the mid to late eighth century as the Qur'an which we now know.

From this brief survey we can conclude that the archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Qur'an proves to be the most damaging. Not only do the seventh and eighth century ruins and inscriptions from the area seem to contradict the notion that Muhammad canonized a direction of prayer during his lifetime, or that he had formulated a scripture known as the Qur'an, but the idea of his universal prophethood, that he was the final "seal" of all prophets is brought into question. This indeed is significant and troublesome.

The question we must now pose is whether there is any archaeological evidence to corroborate the authenticity for the Bible? Do the same problems exist with the Bible that we find with the Qur'an?

[B] THE BIBLE'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE:

(1900=Abraham, 1700=Joseph, 1447=Moses, 1000=David):

What has become evident over the last few decades is that unlike the difficulties found with the Qur'anic evidence, the most fruitful area for a confirmation of the Bible's reliability has come from the field of archaeology, for it is here that the past can speak to us the clearest concerning what happened then.

Because Abraham is honoured by both Christianity and Islam it is interesting to look at the archaeological evidence concerning his time which is now coming to light in the twentieth century. What we find is that archaeology clearly places Abraham in Palestine and not in Arabia.

1) **Abraham's name** appears in Babylonia as a personal name at the very period of the patriarchs, though the critics believed he was a fictitious character who was redacted back by the later Israelites.

2) **The field of Abram in Hebron** is mentioned in 918 B.C., by the Pharaoh *Shishak* of Egypt (now also believed to be Ramases II). He had just finished warring in Palestine and inscribed on the walls of his temple at *Karnak* the name of the great patriarch, proving that even at this early date Abraham was known not

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in Arabia, as Muslims contend, but in Palestine, the land the Bible places him.

3) **The Beni Hasan Tomb** from the Abrahamic period, depicts Asiatics coming to Egypt during a famine, corresponding with the Biblical account of the plight of the 'sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'.

There is further archaeology evidence which supports other Biblical accounts, such as:

4) **The doors of Sodom** (Tell Beit Mirsim) dated to between 2200-1600 B.C. are heavy doors needed for security; the same doors which we find in Genesis 19:9. Yet, if this account had been written between 900-600 B.C., as the critics previously claimed, we would have read about arches and curtains, because security was no longer such a concern then.

5) **Joseph's price as a slave** was 20 shekels (Genesis 37:28), which, according to trade tablets from that period is the correct price for 1,700 B.C. An earlier account would have been cheaper, while a later account would have been more expensive.

6) **Joseph's Tomb** (Joshua 24:32) has possibly been found in *Shechem*, as in the find there is a mummy, and next to the mummy sits an Egyptian official's sword! Is this mere coincidence?

7) **Jericho's** excavation showed that the walls fell outwards, echoing Joshua 6:20, enabling the attackers to climb over and into the town. Yet according to the laws of physics walls of towns always fall inwards! A later redactor would certainly have not made such an obvious mistake, unless he was an eyewitness, as Joshua was.

8) **David's** capture of Jerusalem recounted in II Samuel 5:6-8 and I Chronicles 11:6 speak of Joab using water shafts built by the *Jebusites* to surprise them and defeat them. Historians had assumed these were simply legendary, until archaeological excavations by R.A.S. Macalister, J.G. Duncan, and Kathleen Kenyon on *Ophel* now have found these very water shafts.

Another new and exciting archaeological research is that which has been carried out by the British Egyptologist, **David Rohl**. Until a few years ago we only had archaeological evidence for the Patriarchal, Davidic and New Testament periods, but little to none for the Mosaic period. Yet one would expect much data on this period due to the cataclysmic events which occurred during that time. David Rohl (in *A Test of Time*) has given us a possible reason why, and it is rather simple. It seems that we have simply been off in our dates by almost 300 years! By redating the Pharaonic lists in Egypt he has been able to now identify the abandoned city of the Israelite slaves (called *Avaris*), the death pits from the tenth plague, and Joseph's original tomb and home. There remain many 'tells' yet to uncover.

In the New Testament material we are again dependant on archaeology to corroborate a number of facts which the critics considered to be at best dubious and at worst in error.

9) Paul's reference to **Erastus** as the treasurer of Corinth (Romans 16:23) was thought to be erroneous, but now has been confirmed by a pavement found in 1929 bearing his name.

It is to Luke, however, that the skeptics have reserved their harshest criticisms, because he more than any other of the first century writers spoke about specific peoples and places. Yet, surprisingly, once the dust had settled on new inscription findings, it is Luke who has confounded these same critics time and again. For instance:

10) Luke's use of the word **Meris** to maintain that Philippi was a "district" of Macedonia was doubted until inscriptions were found using this very word to describe divisions of a district.

11) Luke's mention of **Quirinius** as the governor of Syria during the birth of Jesus has now been proven accurate by an inscription from Antioch.

12) Luke's usage of **Politarchs** to denote the civil authority of Thessalonica (Acts 17:6) was questioned, until some 19 inscriptions have been found that make use of this title, 5 of which are in reference to Thessalonica.

13) Luke's usage of **Praetor** to describe a Philippian ruler instead of **duumvir** has been proven accurate, as the Romans used this term for magistrates of their colonies.

14) Luke's usage of **Proconsul** as the title for Gallio in Acts 18:12 has come under much criticism by secular historians, as the later traveller and writer Pliny never referred to Gallio as a Proconsul. This fact alone, they said, proved that the writer of Acts wrote his account much later as he was not aware of Gallio's true position. It was only recently that the **Delphi Inscription**, dated to 52 AD was uncovered. This inscription states, "As Lusius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia..." Here then was secular corroboration for the Acts 18:12 account. Yet Gallio only held this position for one year. Thus the writer of Acts had to have written this verse in or around 52 AD, and not later, otherwise he would not have known Gallio was a proconsul. Suddenly this supposed error not only gives credibility to the historicity of the Acts account, but also dates the writings in and around 52 AD. Had the writer written the book of Acts in the 2nd century as many liberal scholars suggest he would have agreed with Pliny and both would have been

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contradicted by the eyewitness account of the Delphi Inscription.

It is because of discoveries such as this that **F.F.Bruce** states, "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say that archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."

In light of archaeological evidence, books such as Luke and Acts reflect the topography and conditions of the second half of the first century AD and do not reflect the conditions of any later date. Thus it is because Luke, as a historian has been held to a higher accountability than the other writers, and because it has been historical data which has validated his accounts, we can rest assured that the New Testament can be held in high regard as a reliable historical document.

We have no reason to fear archaeology. In fact it is this very science which has done more to authenticate our scriptures than any other. Thus we encourage the secular archaeologists to dig, for as they dig we know they will only come closer to that which our scriptures have long considered to be the truth, and give us rise to claim that indeed our Bible has the right to claim true authority as the only historically verified Word of God. This is why so many eminent archaeologists are standing resolutely behind the Biblical accounts. Listen to what they say (taken from McDowell's Evidences 1972:65-67):

G.E. Wright states, "We shall probably never prove that Abram really existed...but what we can prove is that his life and times, as reflected in the stories about him, fit perfectly within the early second millennium, but imperfectly within any later period."

Sir Frederic Kenyon mentions, "The evidence of archaeology has been to re-establish the authority of the Old Testament, and likewise to augment its value by rendering it more intelligible through a fuller knowledge of its background and setting."

William F. Albright (a renowned archaeologist) says, "The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the 18th and 19th centuries, certain phases which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

Millar Burrows of Yale states, "On the whole, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record."

Joseph Free confirms that while thumbing through the book of Genesis, he mentally noted that each of the 50 chapters are either illuminated or confirmed by some archaeological discovery, and that this would be true for most of the remaining chapters of the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Nelson Glueck (a Jewish Reformed scholar and archaeologist) probably gives us the greatest support for the historicity of the Bible when he states, "To date no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a single, properly understood biblical statement."

CONCLUSION:

Now that we have carried out a cursory study of the historicity for both the Qur'an and the Bible, it is important that we make some conclusions. What can we say concerning the veracity of these two scriptures in light of the evidence produced by the manuscript, document and archeological data at our disposal?

Starting with the Qur'an, it is reasonable to conclude that these findings indeed give us reason for pause concerning its reliability. Manuscript, as well as documentary and archaeological evidence indicates that much of what the Qur'an maintains does not coincide with the historical data at our disposal which comes from that period. From the material amassed from external sources in the 7th-8th centuries, we now know:

- 1) that the **Jews** still retained a relationship with the Arabs until at least 640 AD;
- 2) that Jerusalem and not Mecca was more-than-likely the city which contained the original **sanctuary** for Islam, as **Mecca** was not only unknown as a viable city until the end of the seventh century, but it was not even on the international trade route;
- 3) that the **Qibla** (direction of prayer) was not fixed towards Mecca until the eighth century, but to an area much further north, possibly Jerusalem;
- 4) that the **Dome of the Rock** situated in Jerusalem was possibly the original sanctuary;
- 5) that **Muhammad** was not known as the seal of prophets until the late seventh century;
- 6) that the earliest we even hear of any **Qur'an** is not until the mideighth century;
- 7) and that the earliest Qur'anic **writings** do not coincide with the current Qur'anic text.

All of this data contradicts the Qur'an which is in our possession, and adds to the suspicion that the Qur'an which we now read is NOT the same as that which was supposedly collated and canonized in 650 AD

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under Uthman, as Muslims contend (if indeed it even existed at that time). One can only assume that there must have been an evolution in the Qur'anic text. Consequently, the sole thing we can say with a certainty is that only the documents which we now possess (from 790 AD onwards) are the same as that which is in our hands today, written not 16 years after Muhammad's death but 160 years later, and thus not 1,400 years ago, but only 1,200 years ago.

As for the Bible, with the abundance of existing manuscripts (handwritten copies) of the New Testament (more than 24,000), we know little has been lost through the transmission of the text. In fact there is more evidence for the reliability of the text of the New Testament than there is for any ten pieces of classical literature put together. It is in better textual shape than the 37 plays of William Shakespeare which were written a mere 300 years ago, after the invention of the printing press! This is indeed surprising, considering the early period in which the manuscripts were compiled, as well as the flimsy material on which they were written. The fact that we have such an abundance of manuscripts still in our possession points to the importance the church has held for their scriptures over the centuries. As far as we can know, the names, places, and events mentioned in the Bible have been recorded accurately so that what we have is the representation of what God said and did. Besides the massive numbers of early New Testament documents, the Old Testament can also be substantiated by the Jewish community who continue to corroborate the proof for its accuracy, as well as documents such as the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls which give added weight to the claim that it has never been changed.

Even the Qur'an, possibly written during the 7th-8th centuries recognized the authority of our scriptures (see suras 2:136; 3:2-3; 4:136; 5:47-52,68; 10:95; 21:7; and 29:46). We also know that, outside of the few scribal errors, the historical events and personages are adequately correct, as they do not confuse names, dates and events, and in fact, surprisingly, continue to coincide with current archaeological findings. This is indeed significant, since with each successive year, ongoing documental and archaeological discoveries fail to divulge any historical contradictions. Instead they continue to corroborate what the Bible has been saying for 2,000-3,000 years (examples such as the *Ebla* tablets, or the newly discovered tomb of the priest *Caiaphus* give continuing credibility to the scriptures historical trustworthiness).

Therefore, the testimony of the historical evidence is that the Bible and not the Qur'an can be trusted as an accurate and reliable historical document. While we continue to unearth data which substantiates the Bible's accuracy, we likewise unearth further data which eradicates the validity for the Qur'anic account. If a scripture claims to be a revelation from God, it must prove its claim by establishing its historical credentials, to the extent that even a third party can agree upon the evidence provided. This the Bible and not the Qur'an does adequately.

We must also know that the Bible is unique? Consider: Here is a book written over a 1,500 year span (about 40 generations), by more than 40 authors, among whose number were found: kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, a herdsman, a general, a cupbearer, a doctor, a tax collector, and a rabbi. It was written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe, and in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial topics, yet from Genesis right on through to Revelation the authors all spoke with harmony and continuity on the theme of the unfolding story of "God's redemption of humanity."

If God truly created the world for His pleasure, He would have created it to work to a pattern. This pattern we would expect to find revealed in His Word; as indeed we do, not only in the life of Jesus, the incarnate Word, who came and dwelt among us, but in the truth of the Gospel which was found in His teaching and later written down by His apostles. It is therefore not surprising that many cultures and governments even today continue to follow its precepts, laws and institutions, even though they do not necessarily adhere to its authorship.

It should not surprise us then that the Bible continues to be the source of God's revelation to His creation, for families and communities around the world, and that, according to the latest statistics, the Bible and not the Qu'ran is uncontested as the most popular book ever written. The statistics prove that it is read by more people and published in more languages than any other book in the history of humanity, so that even now "one copy of the Bible is published every three seconds day and night; or 22 copies every minute day and night; or 1,369 copies every hour day and night; and 32,876 copies every day in the year, and so on..."

It is logical, then, that Christianity, because it holds the repository of Biblical principles and thinking, is the fastest conversion-growing religion in the world today. What better testimony could one ask to demonstrate the Bible's claim to be the truly revealed and inspired Word of God.

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HISTORICAL COMPARATIVE BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND THE OUR'AN

(overview:)

CHRISTIANITY

MANUSCRIPTS

-**New Testament** written before the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, & before the fire of Rome, because these events plus the martyrdoms of James (62 AD) Paul (64 AD) & Peter (65 AD), all pivotal Christian events, are not mentioned in Acts.

-**New Testament extant manuscripts**

5,300 Greek

10,000 Latin Vulgate

9,300 other early versions

=+ **24,000** manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today!

=**230 MSS** compiled before the 7th century!!

-**Magdalene Manuscript** (Dr.Thiede)=50-68AD? (KE=Kurios=Lord) oldest of 98 Papyrus

=**15,000 translations**: Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, Nubian, Georgian, Ethiopic

=**2,135 Lectionaries** from 6th century

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=**32,000** quotes from **Early Church Fathers letters**; all New Testament except for **11 verses** (before 325AD)

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

- Moses** didn't write?, yet **Black Stele** found = laws of *Hammurabi* 300 yrs. before Moses.
- Daniel** not 2nd but 6th BC, **East India Inscription**= Dan.4:30=Nebuchadnezzar building.
- Dead Sea Scrolls**=100BC=Massoretic MS=916AD (except Essene cult variations Lam.\Jer.)
- Armana tablets**: (Egypt) "Apiru"=Hebrew (?), 1st given to Abraham (Gen.14:13)

-**Ebla tablets**: (Syria) 17,000=Tell Mardikh, 2300 BC = Deuteronomy law code, which

included the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, Zoar=Gen. 14:8

-**Mari tablets**: (Euphrates) Arriyuk= Arioch= Gen.14 Nahor, Haran=Gen.24:10, Benjamin

-**Nuzi tablets**: (Iraq) speaks of 6 Patriarchal customs

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACCURACY

- Abraham**= on Babylonian inscription
- Field of Abram in Hebron** =918 BC by *Shishak* of Egypt, on walls of *Karnak* temple
- Doors of Sodom**:2200-1600BC=heavy=Gen.19:9, 900-600BC = arch/curtains (security)
- Beni Hasan Tomb**: Asiatics went to Egypt/famine
- Joseph's price**: (20shekels) Gen.37:28=1,700 BC, earlier cheaper, later more
- Joseph's Tomb**: Joshua 24:32 = in *Shechem*- found mummy with Egyptian sword!
- Jericho's walls** fell outwards=Joshua 6:20,
- David's Water shafts** found (II Sam.5:6-8; I Chron.11:6)

LUKE'S accuracy:

- (**Erastus**)= *Corinth* treasurer (Rom. 16:23), pavement found in 1929 with this name.
- (**Meris**)=Philippi a "district" of *Macedonia* doubted until inscriptions use it for district.
- (**Politarchs**)=civil authority of *Thessalonica* (Acts 17:6) 19 inscriptions use it, 5 in *Thessalonica*
- (**Praetor**)= *Philippian* ruler instead of *Duumvir*, Romans used Praetor earlier.
- (**Proconsul**)= title for *Gallio* (Acts 18:12) -corroborated by **Delphi Inscription** (52 AD) Gallio held this position for 1yr.
- (**Quirinius**)=governor of *Syria* at Jesus' birth= an inscription from *Antioch*

British Museum Exhibits on Biblical Material:

- Shalmaneser III** (Assyrian King=859-824 BC) names Ahab & Benhadad of Syria.
- Jehu** is pictured and named on the black obelisk. **I kings 22:1; II kings 9-10**
- Tiglath-Pileser III** (Assyrian king= 745-727 BC) Menahem (Israel King) mentioned Bible 9 times (**2Kings**)
- Sargon II** (Assyrian king=722 BC) mentioned in **Is.20:1** = Sargon & Ashdod city's fall. Sargon's annals mention fall of Ashdod. Nimrud Prism mentions Israel's fall.
- Sennacherib** (Assyrian king= 701 BC)
 - Taylor Prism** = mentions Jerusalem will not fall, that 30 talents of Gold will be given, that Hezekiah would be shut up, that the Assyrians left Lachish's & of Judah's fall. Also on 2 scorched walls of Ninevah. =Ninevah will burn mentioned in **Nahum 1:10; 2:6,13; 3:13,15.**
- Siloam Tunnel** (710 BC) 1,777 ft. (Gihon spring to Siloam Pool), built by Hezekiah (**2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron.32:3-4,30**), found in 1880
- Hazor, Canaanite City** (1280-1230 BC)
 - Canaanites before Israelites (1200 BC), then displaced violently twice by Israelites (**Joshua 11** [1400BC]; **Judges 4-5** [1235 BC])
- Amarna Letters** (1400-1367 BC) -Shows result of Joshuas conquest (**Joshua 5-14**)
- Ahab's Ivories** (850 BC) -from **I Kings 22:39**
- Lachish Letters** (586 BC) -by Lachish military leader of Judah's king, Zedekiah.Nebuchadnezzar; writes Yahweh & Azekah(**Jer.34:7**)
- Nimrud Palace Inscription** (732 BC) Tiglath-pileser III's annals= imprisoning Israelites, Ahaz's tribute,

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Rezin's (Syrian king) & Pekah's (Judean king) deaths, king Hoshea's reign (2Kings 15:22-31; 16:5-9; 1Chron. 5:25; 2Chron. 28; Is.7)

-Royal Tombs of Ur (2500 BC)

proves that Ur existed. Ram caught in a thicket helps authenticate the Biblical narrative.

-Epic of Gilgamesh (600 BC)

Mesopotamian account of the flood, some similarities with Genesis account: boat, animals, etc... pointing to roots in oral tradition stretching back to the event itself.

***Cylinder Inscription of Nabonidus (539 BC)**

-Daniel 5 tells us that Daniel interprets Belshazzar's dream. Yet who is Belshazzar? Nabonidus was the last recorded Babylonian king by secular historians. This inscription mentions that Belshazzar is Nabonidus's son. Later historians (i.e. Herodotus in 450 BC) didn't know this because when Babylon fell no inscriptions had been written, as Belshazzar had not become the sole ruler. Thus the author of Daniel had to have been an eyewitness to have known something so specific!

***Nabonidus Chronicle (555-539 BC)**

-But why was Daniel promised the third position in the kingdom of he interpreted the dream (Daniel 5:16)? This chronicle mentions that while Nabonidus was in Tema, Arabia, his son [Belshazzar] was in Babylon, thus the two were co-regents, which explains why Daniel was promised the third place in the kingdom. Only an eyewitness could have known this, for this fact was not known even 100 years later!

-Cyrus Cylinder (540-530 BC)

-Explains Cyrus's policy to restore liberty and social standing of foreign captives, allowing them to return to their homelands, and worship according to their own traditions, echoing Ezra 1:1-3

ISLAM

MANUSCRIPTS

-Oral trad., mss. aged, disintegrated - mss. exists?

Uthmanic recension. not **Topkapi / Sammarkand**

-must do **AMS** analysis and **SCRIPT** Analysis

1. **Ma'il** 7th-9th century (Medina and Mecca).
2. **Mashq** 7th century onwards.
3. **Kufic** 8th-11th century (needs **landscape** format).
4. **Naskh** 11th century till today.

-Coins: Mashq=upto 750AD, Kufic=750AD onwards!

-Noldeke, Hawting, Schacht, Lings, Safadi all date Topkapi/Sammarkand to 9th century.

-Quraish = Mecca, Kufa = 636 AD = Persia.

-Ma'il Qur'an in British Library, Lings=**790AD**

-Conclusion: no Uthmanic recension,

Qur'an= 1,200 years old, 150 year gap!!!

Talmudic Sources:

-Cain & Abel: S.5:31 = Targum Jonathan-ben-Uzziah S.5:32 = Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

-Abraham: (S.21:51-71) = Midrash Rabbah

-Solomon & Sheba: (S.27:17-44) = II Targum of Esther

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

JEWS split with Muh.624 AD(S.2:144-150)

-**Doctrina Iacobi**, 642AD Jews/Saracens allied

-**Armenian Chronicler**, 660 AD= Jews & Ishmaelites together upto 640 AD

MECCA(S.3:96)=1st sanctuary, Adam=Kaaba, 1st city, Abraham/Ishmael, Trade

-no ancient reference till 724AD ("Makoraba" 1st?)

-**sources:** Lammens=*Periplus* (50AD), *Pliny* (79AD) vs. *Cosmas, Procopius, Theodoretus* (5th-6th)

-no overland trade post-1st cent.= maritime=Red Sea

-no trade post-3rd cent, then Ethiopians (*Adulis*)

-Mecca a valley, no water, unlike *Taif* 50 miles away

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-cheaper 1,250 miles by ship than 50 miles by camel

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACCURACY

QIBLA (S.2:144-150) Jeru->Mecca 624AD

-Wasit, Baghdad & Kufa = West, Al 'As =East

-Syrian Caliphal Palaces = Jerusalem

-Jacob of Edessa 705 AD to Jerusalem

DOME OF THE ROCK: by Abd al-Malik 691AD,Mi'raj?

-inscriptions polemical & not same as Qur'an! -variant verbal forms, & extensive deviancies

-no Qibla, octagonal, perhaps 1st sanctuary?

NEVO'S INSCRIPTIONS: Arabic, religious after 661 AD-no Muhammad formula till 690 AD

-then *Tawhid, Muhammad rasul Allah*, Jesus=man -on *Protocols* suddenly & only, until 724AD

Note: compared to the Biblical archaeological evidence, there is no archaeological evidence for Adam, Abraham, or Ishmael in **Arabia!**

British Museum Qur'anic Exhibits:

-Ma'il Qur'an in MSS exhibit (790 AD)

-Kufic Qur'ans in MSS exhibit (9th centuries)

-**COINS:**Umayyad (*Naskh, Mashq*) & Abbasid (*Kufic*) -coins place the Kufic script from 750 AD and not before, so Samarkand and Topkapi must be post-750 AD!!

THE BIBLE
(A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC)

(Jay Smith)

INTRODUCTION: IS THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY?

[I] REVELATION

- [A] Muslims: Three kinds of revelation
- [B] Christians: four forms of revelation
- [C] Definition of Revelation

[II] INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

- [A] The Biblical authority for inspiration
- [B] The Extent of Inspiration

[III] A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLE

- [A] The Canon
- [B] The Historical Reliability of the Bible
 - (1) Manuscripts
 - (2) Dating
 - (3) Eyewitness accounts
 - (4) Hostile Accounts
 - (5) Versions or translations
 - (6) Lectionaries
 - (7) Early Church Fathers
- [C] ARCHAEOLOGY
 - (1) What the Archaeologists say
 - (2) Old Testament Examples
 - (3) New Testament Examples

[IV] EVIDENCES FOR THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY

- [A] Its Fulfilled Prophecies
- [B] Its extraordinary Unity and Harmony
- [C] Its amazing Circulation
- [D] Its Appeal to all Classes everywhere
- [E] Its Wisdom and high Moral Teaching
- [F] Its life-changing power

[V] ANSWERING THE CRITICS

- [A] Common Misconceptions
 - (1) The New Testament is a newer or changed version of the Old Testament
 - (2) The New Testament abrogates the Old Testament?
 - (3) The Bible has been corrupted by Jews and Christians
 - (4) The Jesus Seminar proves the Bible's corruption
 - (5) The Gospel of Barnabas is the real gospel
- [B] Answers to Specific Muslim Accusations
 - (1) Multiple Versions of the Bible
 - (2) The Apocrypha
 - (3) Variant Readings
 - (4) 50,000 Errors
 - (5) Biblical Contradiction (or Numerical Errors)
 - (6) The Question of Authorship
 - (7) Parallel Passages in the Bible
 - (8) Pornography in the Bible

CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY (so use it, don't abuse it!)

INTRODUCTION

Whenever a Christian and Muslim find themselves in dialogue, it soon becomes quite apparent that there are irreconcilable differences between that which they believe. Muslims contend Jesus was only a prophet, while Christians believe He was the Son of God; Muslims maintain there is no need for atonement, while Christians believe without it we are still lost for eternity, and so on... The Christian asks the Muslim why he or she says the things they do, and they respond that they repeat only what they have learned from the Qur'an. In reply the Christian claims that what they believe also comes from the Word of God, the Bible. It doesn't take long before both sides realize that neither party can agree with the other because the authority for what each believes and says is at a variance one with the other. The Bible contradicts much of what the Qur'an says, and this fact alone will continue to negate many worthwhile conversations which they may wish to indulge in.

So, what is the solution? If two documents which claim to hold propositional truth are in contradiction with each other, it is imperative to ascertain whether the contradictions can be explained adequately. And if not, then the natural conclusion is that one or both of the documents are false. From there the question must be forwarded concerning whether either of the scriptures can stand up to verification; in other words whether they can withstand an external critical analysis of their authenticity.

This is an enormously intricate and difficult subject. Both Islam and Christianity maintain that they receive their beliefs from 'divinely inspired' truth. Consequently, to suspect the source for this truth, the scriptures for each faith, is to put the integrity of both Christianity and Islam on trial. This is obviously a task that should not be taken lightly, and I do not intend to do so here.

Consequently, I have decided not to attempt a simplistic analysis concerning the authority of the Qur'an and the Bible in one single paper. Instead I have tackled the authority of the Qur'an in two previous papers (entitled The Qur'an, a Christian Apologetic, and Is the Qur'an the Word of God?), with a follow-up paper analysing the historical evidence for both scriptures (entitled The Bible and the Qur'an, an Historical Comparison). With this paper I will now turn my attention to the authority for our own scriptures, **the Bible**, applying much the same criteria used in the previous three.

I will admit from the outset that as a Christian I do have a bias towards the authenticity for the Biblical account. This bias is evidenced in this paper, particularly in the latter sections where I try to answer the criticisms levelled against our scriptures. I simply ask the reader to accept my presuppositional base and take the arguments I posit at face value. I trust the defences I give will speak for themselves, so that you as the reader will come away with the conclusion that indeed the Bible stands resolute as the true and final Word of God.

In no way do I claim to know all the answers, nor will I be so pretentious as to assume that I can exhaustively argue the question of authority for both the Qur'an and the Bible in these few papers. The studies are nothing more than mere "overviews," with the hope that they will stimulate the readers to continue studying these very important areas in their own time. The hope is that, like Peter before us, we too can **"always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have"** (1 Peter 3:15).

In the previous studies we asked whether the Qur'an could claim to be the final word of God, and we concluded that it lacked authority in a number of key areas. We looked at the Muslim concept of revelation and inspiration, noting how it differed from that of our own, and decided that this difference could be blamed for much of the misunderstandings which exist between our two faiths. We also noted that the Qur'an had linguistic deficiencies, which put doubt to its claim of being a truly perfect and distinctive divine document.

Concerning its claim as a **universal** document (sura 34:28), we came to the conclusion that in reality the material it contains reflects more a 7th-9th century **Arabic** mind-set (suras 14:4; 42:7; 43:3), and merely follows the life and needs of one man, **Muhammad** (suras 33:21, 36-38, 50-51; 66:1). We then asked how the Qur'an came to us, pointing out the various problems with its **collation**. Turning our attention to a more

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polemical slant we noted that though the Qur'an claims to be **perfect** (suras 2:23; 10:37-38; 17:88), there were many **contradictions** (suras 4:157 vs. 19:33; 7:54 vs. 41:9-12; 17:101 vs. 7:133; 79:40-41 vs. 4:24-25, 55:46-78; etc...) and **errors** which were quite easily identifiable within the text (suras 5:116; 7:124; 19:7; 20:85-97; 31:1037:6-10; 65:12, etc...). We then concluded our study by asking, why, if it is the **eternal** word of God (sura 85:22), so many of its stories have parallels with late second - fourth century (AD) **Jewish Talmudic** accounts, which even the Jewish community considered to be quite heretical (i.e. Cain in Abel's story in sura 5:31-32 = Targum of Jonathan-ben Uzziah and Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5; Abraham's story in sura 21:51-71 = The Midrash Rabbah; and Solomon and Sheba's story in sura 27:17-44 = II Targum of Esther, etc...)?

When we added up all these problems we were left with only one conclusion: that the Qur'an, rather than convincing us with its claim as the final word of God, comes across as no more than another man-made religious document, which can possibly give us an insight into the culture and world-view of the 7th-9th century Middle East, but nothing more (Crone 1980:7).

On the other hand we have as an alternative the Jewish and Christian scriptures in our possession which we can turn to as a source of God's revelation to humanity. In order to have parity in our study it is important that we, likewise, scrutinize the Bible with a similar standard for authenticity that we levied on the Qur'an. Thus, we must apply the same critical analysis to the Bible and ask whether it can stand up to the same scrutiny. Because only then will we feel confident that it alone can make the claim to be the true and final word of God.

In order to begin the discussion, I would like to ask two questions; the first, what we mean by revelation, and the second, how we can claim that the Bible is the uniquely inspired Word of God?

[I] REVELATION:

One of the difficulties we have with Muslims (as we discussed in the paper on the Qur'an) is in defining what we mean by revelation. Muslims assume that our definition of revelation is parallel to theirs. Yet, we now know that this just isn't so; and it is here where I feel much of the confusion lies.

[A] Three kinds of revelation:

There are certain Muslims who, while using the Qur'an as the definitive model of revelation, claim that the New Testament cannot be considered as authoritative as it contains three sets of progressively inferior revelations: namely 1) that which is the Word of **God** (passages where God speaks), 2) that which is the words of a **Prophet** of God (passages where Jesus speaks), and 3) that which is the words of an **historian** (passages where things are said about Jesus). They maintain that Islam, unlike Christianity, has separated these categories into three different genre: The **Qur'an** which has only the Words of God, the **Hadith**, which contain the words of the prophet, and other **books** (the *Tafsir* and *Tahriq*) which are a "compilation of writings" by historians.

Christians do not deny that in the Bible we find combined these three styles of revelation. Yet we would point out to those Muslims who have a problem with this that in the Qur'an examples of these same three forms of revelation can likewise be found. For instance, the Qur'an contains many passages which record the words of the prophets of Allah. Take for example Sura 3:40, where the prophet Zakariya questions how he can have a son. Could Allah be speaking these words? Another example can be found in Sura 19:64 where we clearly find the words of angels speaking directly to Muhammad about Allah.

Furthermore, in the Hadith we find many words which are not those of the prophet, but of Allah himself. These sayings are referred to as *Hadith Qudsi*, which when translated means divine sayings. An example can be found in *Sahih Muslim*, vol.4, pg.1476.

The Qur'an, as well, has passages which read as if they came from an historian. The passage which relates to the birth of Jesus from his mother Mary falls into this category (Sura 19:22-23). This is no different in narrative form to what Mark 11:13 says of Jesus. Ironically, it is this very verse in Mark which Ahmed Deedat (the well-known Muslim apologist) uses as an example of a historical narrative, though he claims the same is not found in the Qur'an.

Thus, the claim by Muslims that the words of Allah, of prophets and historians are kept jealously apart in their revelations is simply not true. Like the New Testament, the Qur'an has words of prophets and historical narratives throughout its pages. Furthermore the less authoritative Hadith also contain alleged sayings of Allah as well as those of prophets.

What then is the point of this argument? Why are Muslims so keen on claiming that the New Testament is somehow deficient because it includes both the words of prophets and those of historians? The primary reason possibly has to do with a confusion over what both Muslims and Christians delineate by divine revelation.

[B] Definition of Revelation:

Muslims believe that the book, the Qur'an, is Allah's ultimate revelation to humanity because it came down directly, word for word, to Muhammad via the angel *Jibril* (this process is referred to in Arabic as *nazil*, sura 17:85).

Christians, meanwhile believe that while God used prophets to reveal information about Himself, ultimately God cannot reveal Himself truly in words alone. True self-revelation had to come about by an "uncovering" of Himself. This happened when God intersected time and space and came to earth in the body of a human (Hebrews 10:5), as Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus could say in John 14:9, "He that has seen me has seen the Father." He, therefore, is the ultimate revelation from God, as Jesus was God Himself, in the flesh.

The entire Old Testament moves progressively towards this culmination of revelation, when God came Himself and revealed Himself truly. Yet, what we now know about that event 2,000 years ago we do not find in a book written by Christ himself. Instead we find His life and teachings written in the pages of the New Testament, which the Muslims believe to be invalid. Yet Christians believe that this is the inspired revelation from God which has come to us, much as all previous revelations of God have come, via individuals chosen by God for that task. Here, then, is where many of the problems concerning revelation between Muslims and Christians lie.

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Christians believe that the entire Bible shows the imprint of human hands. Evidence of this can be found in the variety of human languages used, the varying styles of writing, the differences in the author's intellects and temperaments, as well as the apparent allusions to the author's contemporary concepts of scientific knowledge, without which the scriptures would not have been understood by the people of that time.

This Christian criteria for revelation, however, is not acceptable to Muslims, as it is in seeming conflict with their own. Yet, by simply measuring the Bible against the *nazil* concept which they claim for their Qur'an, Muslims condemn themselves of duplicity, since they demand of the New Testament that which they do not demand of the previous revelations, the *Taurat* and *Zabuur*, though both are revered as equally inspired revelations by all Muslims. Muslims believe that Moses wrote the *Taurat* and David the *Zabuur*. However, neither claimed to have received their revelations by a means of a *nazil* transmission. So why insist on such for the New Testament, especially since the document makes no such claim itself?

The underlying reason perhaps lies in the belief by Muslims that the Qur'an, because it is the only revelation which came "unfettered" by human intervention, is thus the truest and clearest statement of Allah's word, and therefore supersedes all previous revelations, even annulling those revelations, as they have supposedly been corrupted by the limitations of their human authors.

Left unsaid is the glaring irony that the claim for a *nazil* revelation for the Qur'an comes from one source alone, the man to which it was supposedly revealed, Muhammad. There are no external witnesses both before or at the time who can corroborate Muhammad's testimony. Not even miracles are provided to substantiate his claims.

In fact, the evidences for the authority of God's revelation which the Bible emphatically demands are completely absent in the Qur'an; namely, that the prophet of God must speak in the Name of God, *Yahweh* (Exodus 3:1-6,13-15; Psalms 72:17-19; and Revelation 1:8,17); that his 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); that he must make predictions which are verifiable (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 43:9; and John 13:18-21), and that his revelation must be accompanied by signs and wonders in order to give him authority as having come from God. Because these are missing in the case of the prophet Muhammad and of the Qur'an, it seems indeed that **the Qur'an, and not the Biblical scriptures turn out to be the most human of documents.**

Muslims must understand that Christians have always maintained that the Word of God was indeed written by men, but that these men were always under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Whereas the Qur'an is alleged to be free of any human element, God in the Bible deliberately chose to reveal His Word through individuals who were inspired prophets and apostles, so that His Word would not only be conveyed to humanity but would be communicated to their understanding and powers of comprehension as well. This the Qur'an cannot do if it has no human element, as is generally alleged.

[III] INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE:

We now come to the other difficulty for Muslims concerning the authority of our scriptures, the problem of inspiration. If our scriptures did not come directly word-for-word from God (*nazil*), then how, they ask, do we know whether what we have in our possession today is that which God had intended?

The initial answer is that the Bible itself claims its own inspiration.

[A] The Biblical authority for inspiration:

In 2 Timothy 3:16, we are told that all Scripture is inspired. The word used for inspiration is *theopneustos* which means "God-breathed," inferring that what was written had its origin in God Himself. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read that the writers were "moved" by God. Thus, God used each writer, including his personality to accomplish a divinely authoritative work, for God cannot inspire error. The writers received the actual recording of truth.

The Bible speaks many times of its inspiration: In Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39; and Hebrews 10:7, Jesus says that what was written in the entire Old Testament spoke of Him, and would come to pass. Romans 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12 refer to the Old Testament as the Word of God. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:13, "It is the emphatic testimony of Paul that he spoke in 'words'...taught by the Spirit." This is corroborated in 2 Timothy 3:16, as we saw above. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 it reads, "...you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God." Again in 2 Peter 1:21 Peter writes, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [moved] by the Holy Spirit." And then finally in

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Revelation 22:18,19 the writer John states, "...if anyone adds to them [the scriptures], God shall add to him the plagues...and if anyone takes away from the words of the book...God shall take away his part from the tree of life..."

Charles Wesley summarizes this high view of inspiration brilliantly when he says, "The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God. However, it was not written by good men, because good men would not tell lies by saying 'Thus saith the Lord;' it was not written by bad men because they would not write about doing good duty, while condemning sin, and themselves to hell; thus, it must be written by divine inspiration" (McDowell 1990:178).

Muslims would point out that we had fallen into the same trap for which we condemn them. To say that the Bible gives itself authority for inspiration is similar to Arabs who claim the Arab language as God's unique language, or the claim of Muhammad for the Qur'an's authority, which then gives him his authority as a prophet. It's all too convenient, cyclical and somewhat subjective. The argument, according to Muslims, goes something like this: "Christians claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and as proof of this contention, they quote a passage from the Bible that says it is" (i.e. II Timothy 3:16). Yet, nothing is proved here, as this is mere "Circular Reasoning," since the sole authority for the Bible comes from the document itself. Ironically, it is this very argument which Christians have used with Muslims when pointing to the source for their Qur'anic authority, such that both Muhammad and the Qur'an require each other for their authority; the one supporting the other.

Obviously, if that was the sole criteria we use to corroborate the authority for our scriptures, then such an accusation would be correct, for neither a document (nor a prophet for that matter) may claim authority by virtue of their own testimony. In order to maintain the assertion of authenticity a scripture must demonstrate that it is basically a reliable and trustworthy **historical** document. To verify it as such, we must use the test of historical criticism in order to ascertain whether the scripture is a valid historical record. We must apply to the Bible that which we earlier applied to the Qur'an.

Before we do that, however, it may be helpful to define what we mean by inspiration.

[B] The Extent of Inspiration:

How does God inspire the writers? Does He simply move the writers by challenging their heart to reach new heights, much like we find in the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Homer and Dickens, all of which are human literary masterpieces? Or does that which He inspire contain the words of God-along with myths, mistakes and legends, thus creating a book in which portions of the Word of God can be found, along with those of finite and fallible men? Or are the scriptures the infallible Word of God in their entirety? In other words, how, Muslims will ask, is this inspiration carried out? Does God use mechanical dictation, or does He use the writers own minds and experiences? The simple answer is that God's control is always with them in their writings, such that the Bible is nothing more than "**The Word of God in the words of men**" (McDowell 1990:176).

This then leads on to the follow-up question concerning how much of the scripture is inspired? Is every book, every word, every historical matter, or scientific statement inspired?

There are those who believe in the idea of **Plenary inspiration**. Plenary denotes the full and complete inspiration, extending to all parts. They would maintain that not only are the original documents inspired, but the manuscripts and translations are inspired as well.

Other Christians would not go that far, but say "...co-authorship implies that the Spirit's superintendence does not extend to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration, not dictation) but preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship" (McDowell 1990:176). In other words, the Holy Spirit ensured that everything which was essential was included.

While neither position is contradictory, what is important to remember is that with today's great number of New Testament manuscripts available for scrutiny (approximately 24,000), the science of textual criticism renders us an adequate representation. Therefore, when we read the Bible we can be assured that what we are reading is the inspired Word of God.

Yet, how can we be sure that the scriptures in our hands today are identical with that which were revealed by the Holy Spirit so many centuries ago? Can we verify their authenticity so that they can be trusted as the inspired and revealed Word of God in the words of men? In order to answer that question adequately, it is important to apply a similar historical analysis to the Bible as was applied earlier with the Qur'an. Only then will we know the answer to the question above.

[III] A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLE

In order to maintain the assertion of authenticity a scripture which comes from God must demonstrate not only its impact on those to whom it was written, but it must also prove that it is a reliable and trustworthy **historical** document for those of us who read it today. To verify its claims, there are a number of tests which can be applied to ascertain whether the scripture is a valid historical record. A test applied to one scripture must likewise be applied to the other. Therefore, the tests applied to the Qu'ran must be also applied to the Bible; namely, questioning its sources as well as its makeup, and asking whether there were any external criteria which could corroborate that which the Bible maintains.

The first question Muslim critics always pose regarding the historical authority for the Bible concerns how the canon was devised; in other words, how we came to have the books which make up the Bible currently in our possession.

[A] The Canon

Muslims contend that the canon of the New Testament (in particular) was not formed until quite late, in fact not until the Council of Nicea, in 325 AD. It was only at this time, they say, that the Bible as we know it was finally put together, and this explains why much of its content does not reflect that which we find in the later revelation to Muhammad, the Qur'an.

Unfortunately, many Muslims have not read church history. For if they had they would have found that it was not any council or even the church in the fourth century which created the canon. The canon was already well known by that time. The church in the fourth century simply **recognized** and authorized the books that had always been considered to be inspired from their very inception. Five rules were used by the church to determine canonicity, including:

- 1) was it authoritative: did it come from God? Did it have the seal of apostolic authority?
- 2) was it prophetic: was it written by a man of God?
- 3) was it authentic: the rule-of-thumb was "if in doubt, throw it out."
- 4) was it dynamic: did it change lives?
- 5) was it used: was it read and collected by early Christians (II Peter 3:16)?

As for the Old Testament Canon; it had already been drawn up in 90 AD by the Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai of the school of *Hillel*, at *Jamnia*, due to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Muslims often point to another set of writings which they contend should also be included in the canon, since they are included in some Bibles and not in others. These writings are none other than those of the *Apocrypha*.

The *Apocrypha*, however, were never included in the early canon, neither by the early church fathers nor by those who drew up the canon at Nicea. They were a set of books which were added to the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546 AD, and only then as a polemical ploy against the Reformation movement (McDowell 1972:33-36). Previous to that time they had been excluded from the canon for a number of reasons:

- 1) they had historical and geographical inaccuracies,
- 2) they included false doctrines, as well as subject matter which was artificial, and
- 3) they presented no prophetic power nor any poetic religious feeling (McDowell 1990:40).

We must remember that the Jews had never considered them authentic. Jesus never quoted from them, and the scholars at *Jamnia* did not recognize them. In fact, no Christian council for the first four centuries accepted them. If the Muslims would read the early church father's letters they would realise that they consistently spoke out against them. Even the Roman Catholic scholars upto the Reformation rejected them.

Why then was the New Testament Canon introduced so late? The reason was that there simply was no need for a canon earlier. Every church was aware which books were authoritative and which were not. In fact the need for drawing up a canon only came about in the fourth century because of a heretic named *Marcion* who had devised his own canon in 140 AD, as well as the use of spurious books by the Eastern churches at that time, and the Edict of Diocletian in 303 AD which declared that all Christian sacred books were to be destroyed (McDowell 1972:37).

The primary test for canonicity was apostolic authority, or apostolic approval. The earliest list was drawn up by Athanasius in 367 AD. The list of 27 books was then approved at the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD. Yet, all they did was to record the previously established canonicity of these 27 books, and nothing more (McDowell 1972:36-38; 1990:37-38).

[B] The Historical Reliability of the Bible

While we may disagree with Muslims on certain aspects of canonicity, a much more important test for the Bible's credibility concerns a critical analysis of its historical viability. In other words, can the Bible be placed in history? Are there manuscripts or documents, or even archaeological findings which place it in a particular time and place and therefore corroborate that which we read in its pages? These are the same questions which we posed to the Qur'an in the paper Is the Qur'an the Word of God? But whereas in that study we came up with much devastating data against the credibility of the Qur'an, the same criteria levelled at the Bible proves to be quite different, as it corroborates not only the authority for its credibility but substantiates its claim as the true and final Word of God. Consider:

(1) Manuscripts:

The Bible, a book, was initially made up of numerous manuscripts. Consequently a primary means for ascertaining its credibility are the number of copies from those manuscripts which are in one's possession. The more copies we have the better we can know if the document we now read corresponds with the original. It is much like a witness to an event. If we have only one witness to the event, there is the possibility that the witness's agenda or even an exaggeration of the event has crept in and we would never know the full truth. But if we have many witnesses, the probability that they all got it wrong becomes minute.

Because of time and wear many of the historical documents from the ancient world have few manuscripts to which we can refer. This is specially true when we consider the secular historians and philosophers. We only have eight copies of Herodotus's historical works, whose originals were written in 480-425 BC. Likewise, only 5 copies of Aristotle's writings have found their way to the 20th century, while only 10 copies of the writings of Caesar, along with another 20 copies of the historian Tacitus, and 7 copies from the historian Pliny, who all originally wrote in the first century, are available today (McDowell 1972:42). These are indeed very few.

When we consider the New Testament, however, we find a completely different scenario. We have today in our possession 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, another 10,000 Latin Vulgates, and 9,300 other early versions (MSS), giving us more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence! (taken from McDowell's Evidence That demands a Verdict, vol.1, 1972 pgs.40-48; and Time, January 23, 1995, pg.57). Though we do not have any originals, with such a wealth of documentation at our disposal with which to compare, we can delineate quite adequately what those originals contained.

What's more, a substantial number were written well before the compilation of the Qur'an. In fact, according to research done by Kurt and Barbara Aland, a total of 230 manuscript portions are currently in existence which pre-date 600 AD! These can be broken down into 192 Greek New Testament manuscripts, 5 Greek lectionaries containing scripture, and 33 translations of the Greek New Testament (Aland 1987:82-83). Some of the more important manuscripts are listed in the table in the next section.

Muslims are correct in assuming that not all of the manuscripts are identical. This only makes sense, however, since parchment, or vellum was not invented until the fourth century. Thus all documents previous to that date had to be written on Papyrus, which disintegrated over time and so had to be copied. The differences which we do find in these copies, therefore, can be attributed to scribal errors. These "errors" were bound to creep in considering the numerous copies which were needed to continue the line of succession. We will come back to this point in a later section.

The verses which are in doubt, however, make up only 40 lines (or 400 words) of the New Testament, which is one-half of one percent of the New Testament (McDowell 1990:46). Thus 99.5 % of the New Testament is pure. Yet, not one of these doubtful verses alters an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages found elsewhere. In other words, no fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on any of these disputed reading.

(2) Dating:

Dating the Original writings:

Manuscripts from the ancient world are difficult to find. This is also true of the Biblical manuscripts, as prior to the invention of parchment in the fourth century AD they were all written on Papyrus leaves, which, due to their early disintegration resulted in the original manuscripts having disappeared long ago. Yet, copies were made in order to make the writings more accessible to the wider church. It is from these copies that we have derived our current New Testament. The criticism is often made, however, that because we do not possess the originals the current documents remain suspect, due to the long gap which exists between the originals and the extant copies which we now have.

Yet, unlike the Qur'an which was compiled much more recently, we do not find with the Bible such an enormous gap of time between that which the Bible speaks about and when it was written down. In fact,

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outside of the book of Revelation and the three letters of John considered to have been written later, when we look at the rest of the New Testament books, there is no longer any solid basis for dating them later than 80 AD, which is within 50 years of the death of Jesus Christ (Robinson 1976:79). Most of the New Testament was likely written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and perhaps before the fire of Rome (64 AD), and the subsequent persecution of Christians, since none of these events are mentioned in any of the New Testament writings.

This same argument can be taken a step further. Take for instance the martyrdoms of James in 62 AD, Paul in 64 AD, and Peter in 65 AD. All were leaders in the nascent church. Thus their deaths were momentous events for the Christian community. Yet we find none of the deaths referred to in any of the 27 books of the New Testament (and significantly not in Acts, the most comprehensive historical record we have of the early church). The only explanation can be that they were all written prior to these events, and thus likely before 62 AD, or a mere 30 years after the death of Jesus, of whose life they primarily refer.

Comparing the copies with other ancient Manuscripts:

A further criticism concerns whether the copies we possess are credible. Since we do not possess the originals, people ask, how can we be sure they are identical to them? The initial answer is that we will never be completely certain, for there is no means at our disposal to reproduce the originals. This has always been a problem with all known ancient documents. Yet this same question is rarely asked of other historical manuscripts which we refer to constantly. If they are held to be credible, let's then see how the New Testament compares with them. Let's compare below the time gaps for the New Testament documents with other credible secular documents.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Date Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Copies (extent)</u>
Secular Manuscripts:				
Herodotus (History)	480 - 425 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	8
Thucydides (History)	460 - 400 BC	900 AD	1,300 years	?
Aristotle (Philosopher)	384 - 322 BC	1,100 AD	1,400 years	5
Caesar (History)	100 - 44 BC	900 AD	1,000 years	10
Pliny (History)	61 - 113 AD	850 AD	750 years	7
Suetonius (Roman History)	70 - 140 AD	950 AD	800 years	?
Tacitus (Greek History)	100 AD	1,100 AD	1,000 years	20

Biblical Manuscripts: (note these are individual manuscripts)

Magdalene Ms (Matthew 26)	1st century	50-60 AD	co-existent(?)	
John Rylands (John)	90 AD	130 AD	40 years	
Bodmer Papyrus II (John)	90 AD	150-200 AD	60-110 years	
Chester Beatty Papyri (N.T.)	1st century	200 AD	150 years	
Diatessaron by Tatian (Gospels)	1st century	200 AD	150 years	
Codex Vaticanus (Bible)	1st century	325-350 AD	275-300 years	
Codex Sinaiticus (Bible)	1st century	350 AD	300 years	
Codex Alexandrinus (Bible)	1st century	400 AD	350 years	
(Total New Testament manuscripts = 5,300 Greek MSS, 10,000 Latin Vulgates, 9,300 others = <u>24,000</u> copies)				
(Total MSS compiled prior to 600 AD = 230)				

There were several historians of the ancient world whose works are quite popular. *Thucydides*, who wrote History of the Peloponnesian War, lived from 460 BC to 400 BC. Virtually everything we know about the war comes from his history. Yet, the earliest copy of any manuscripts of *Thucydides'* work dates around 900 AD, a full 1,300 years later! The Roman historian *Suetonius* lived between AD 70 to 140 AD. Yet the earliest copy of his book The Twelve Caesars is dated around AD 950, a full 800 years later. The chart above reveals the time gaps of these and other works from the ancient world and compares them to the earliest New Testament manuscripts (taken from McDowell 1972:42, & Bruce 1943:16-17).

What one notices almost immediately from the table is that the New Testament manuscript copies

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which we possess today were compiled very early, a number of them hundreds of years before the earliest copy of a secular manuscript. This not only shows the importance the early Christians gave to preserving their scriptures, but the enormous wealth we have today for early Biblical documentation.

What is even more significant however, are the differences in time spans between the original manuscripts and the copies of both the biblical and secular manuscripts. It is well known in historical circles that the closer a document can be found to the event it describes the more credible it is. The time span for the biblical manuscript copies listed above are all within 350 years of the originals, some as early as 130-250 years and one even purporting to coexist with the original (i.e. the Magdalene Manuscript fragments of Matthew 26), while the time span for the secular manuscript copies are much greater, between 750-1,400 years! This indeed gives enormous authority to the biblical manuscript copies, as no other ancient piece of literature can make such close time comparisons.

A special note needs to be given to the Magdalene Manuscript, as the new dating for the writing of these manuscript fragments to between 50-68 AD, by Dr. Thiede in 1995-1996, if it is correct, puts the earliest extent MSS for the book of Matthew within 20-30 years of the accounts to which it refers! We do not know if it comes from the original itself, but irregardless, the early dating points out that it was written while Matthew and the early apostles who could corroborate its authenticity were still living (Time, January 23, 1995, pg.57). This indeed points to a scripture which is as authoritative now as it was when it was conceived.

(3) Eyewitness accounts:

We also have many internal eyewitnesses (other Christians, who had accompanied Jesus during His ministry) who were still alive during the time these books were written. They would have remembered what had or had not happened. Thus, any of the claims could have been corroborated or refuted by those to whom the books were addressed. Furthermore there would have been no reason for them to fabricate their accounts, since they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose were they to do so. Almost every New Testament writer (excluding John) was martyred for what they believed and wrote. Certainly they would not have chosen the ultimate price, their lives, to perpetuate a lie. The fact that they were all prepared to pay such a high price proves the accuracy of their accounts. Indeed, the writers knew they would be held accountable, and even allude to this in their writings. Take the example of Luke:

Luke 1:1-3= "...to compile an account of the things **accomplished among us**, just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the Word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order." Luke is referring here to the disciples, those who accompanied Jesus, and knew better than anyone what He said and did.

Acts 2:22= "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man **attested to you** by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him **in your midst**, just as **you yourselves know...**" Here Luke refers to those living in Israel, the Jews, who would have been the first to find error in what he said, as they had little love for the rabbi they called 'the Christ'.

Acts 26:24-26= "...Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter the words of sober truth. For **the king knows about these matters**, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that **none of these things escape his notice**; for this **has not been done in a corner**.'" Finally Luke (quoting Paul) points to a secular Roman official and a Jewish king as witnesses to what had been said and done.

Any one of these witnesses could have contradicted that which was being written, and that is why Luke refers to them, challenging them to remember what they themselves had seen and heard. Nothing he wrote could escape their notice, for "nothing had been done in a corner." (see also: Luke 3:1, John 19:35, II Peter 1:16; I John 1:3)

(4) Hostile Accounts:

Along with the eyewitnesses of the disciples, there were others who would have been delighted to find a fault with the New Testament writers. These were the enemies of Christianity, the Jewish and Roman authorities who sought to destroy the work of Jesus while He was still alive. Yet, what is interesting is that these enemies of Christianity did not so much try to contradict the claims of the early Christians about such events as, for example, the resurrection, as they instead tried to offer other explanations for the events. Take for example the account in Matthew 28:12-15 of the Jewish leaders once they had heard that the body of Jesus had disappeared:

When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were

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instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Had Jesus not risen from the dead, there certainly would have been overwhelming testimony to that effect. Indeed, as we have seen in the last section with Paul arguing before the Roman governor Festus (Acts 26:24-26), the early Christians sometimes appealed to the knowledge of current events of their hearers in making their case for Christianity.

There were also secular historians present who were recording what took place, who were Jewish and Greek. If anyone would have rejected what was being written, they would have been the first, as the Christians were not members of their community, and, in some cases, were even detested by the others. We have the historical accounts of a number of them:

1) **Thallus**, a Greek historian who (as quoted by Julius Africanus) wrote in 52 AD of the crucifixion, even mentioning that the day suddenly turned dark (McDowell 1990:201).

2) **Tacitus** a Roman historian who wrote The Annals of Imperial Rome, between 80-84 AD, mentions the death of Christ, maintaining that it happened during the reign of Tiberius'. But that was not all, because he specifies that it was by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, echoing the Gospel account exactly (McDowell 1990:200).

3) **Josephus** a Jewish historian, living in Rome, who wrote towards the end of the century (90-95 AD) not only of the death of Jesus, and of the martyrdom of the Jesus' brother, James, but mentions the martyrdom of John the Baptist as well. He also refers to the resurrection three days later, but in a document whose reliability is hotly contested (McDowell 1990:199).

4) **Suetonius**, the historian, in his The Twelve Caesars, mentions the expulsion from Rome of the followers of Crestus (a latin reference to Christ), by the emperor Claudius, which is referred to in Acts 18:2 (Suetonius, 1989:202).

4) **Pliny the Younger**, a Roman author and administrator who wrote in 112 AD of the Christian community in Asia Minor, and of their devotion to Christ (McDowell 1990:200).

All of these historians wrote of events which we find in the Bible, particularly pointing to the crucifixion, a historical fact denied by the Qur'an (sura 4:157). Though hostile, these accounts, nonetheless, corroborate that which we find in the gospels and in the letters of Paul.

The fact that the New Testament writers dared to write about all they had seen and heard, knowing full well that both friendly and hostile witnesses would follow their every word makes it reasonable to believe the veracity of their testimony.

(5) Versions or Translations:

Besides the 24,000 extant manuscripts mentioned earlier we also have more than 15,000 existing copies of the various versions written in the **Latin** and **Syriac** (Christian Aramaic), some of which were written around 150 AD, such as the **Syriac Peshitta** (150-250 AD) (McDowell 1990:47).

Because Christianity was a missionary faith from its very inception (Matthew 28:19-20), the scriptures were immediately translated into the known languages of that period. For that reason other written translations appeared later on, such as **Coptic** translations (early 3rd and 4th centuries), **Armenian** (400 AD), **Gothic** (4th century), **Georgian** (5th century), **Ethiopic** (6th century), and **Nubian** (6th century) (McDowell 1972:48-50). The fact that we have so many translations of the New Testament points to its authenticity, as it would have been almost impossible (had the disciples or later followers wanted to corrupt or forge its contents), for them to have amassed all of the translations from the outlying areas and changed each one so that there would have been the uniformity which we find witnessed in these translations today.

(6) Lectionaries:

The practice of reading passages from the New Testament books at worship services began from the 6th century, so that today we have 2,135 lectionaries which have been catalogued from this period (McDowell 1972:52). If there had been a forgery, they too would have all had to have been changed.

(7) Early Church Father's Letters:

But possibly the greatest attestation for the authority of our New Testament are the masses of quotations from its pages by the early church fathers. These were the first generation of Christian leaders. We find numerous quotes of the New Testament from their personal correspondence. For example, Clement of Alexandria, who lived about 150 AD - 212 AD has 2,406 quotes from all but three books of the New Testament. Tertullian, who was an elder of the church in Carthage and who lived between 160 AD - 220 AD quotes the New Testament 7,258 times. Of these quotes, around 3,800 are from the gospels themselves. Other quotes from Church fathers include Justin Martyr, 330 quotes; Irenaeus, 1,819 quotes; Origen, 17,922 quotes,

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Hippolytus, 1,378 quotes; and Eusebius, 5,176 quotes, making a total of 36,289 quotes of the New Testament from just those listed above.

Dean Burgon, who did a study of all the early church father writings, found in all 86,489 quotes from the church fathers (McDowell 1972:50-52; 1990:47-48). And they are not all late. In fact, there are 32,000 quotations from the New Testament found in writings before the council of Nicea in 325 AD (McDowell Evidence, 1972:52). J. Harold Greenlee points out that the quotations of the scripture in the works of the early church writers are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament MSS.

Sir David Dalrymple sought to do this, and from the second and third century writings of the church fathers he found the **entire New Testament quoted except for eleven verses** (McDowell 1972:50-51; 1990:48)! Thus, we could throw the New Testament away and still reconstruct it with the simple help of these letters.

Some examples of these are (from McDowell's **Evidence...**, 1972:51):

Clement (30- 95) quotes from various sections of the New Testament.

Ignatius (70-110 AD) knew the apostles and quoted directly from 15 of the 27 books.

Polycarp (70-156 AD) a disciple of John who quoted often from the New Testament.

[C] ARCHAEOLOGY

(1900=Abraham, 1700=Joseph, 1447=Moses, 1000=David):

If we are to take the Biblical record seriously, we will need to inquire further as to whether there are other sources which we can turn to for a corroboration of its account. Since we are dealing with a book which often speaks of history (referring to people, places, and events), probably the best and easiest way to study that history is to go to the area where that history took place. It is not hard to understand that history never takes place in a vacuum. It always leaves behind its forgotten fingerprints, waiting dormant in the ground to be discovered, dug up and deciphered. It is therefore, important that we also get our didgets dirty and take a look at the treasures which our archaeologist friends are discovering to ascertain if they have been able to reward us with any clues as to the authenticity of the Biblical account.

What has become evident over the last few decades is that the most fruitful area for a confirmation of the Bible has come from archaeology, for it is here that the past can speak to us the clearest concerning what happened then. Let's, therefore, go and find out what it has to show by first asking what the experts have to say.

(1) What the Archaeologists say

(taken from McDowell's Evidences 1972:65-67):

G.E. Wright states, "We shall probably never prove that Abram really existed.. but what we can prove is that his life and times, as reflected in the stories about him, fit perfectly within the early second millennium, but imperfectly within any later period."

Sir Frederic Kenyon mentions, "The evidence of archaeology has been to re-establish the authority of the Old Testament, and likewise to augment its value by rendering it more intelligible through a fuller knowledge of its background and setting."

William F. Albright (a renowned archaeologist) says, "The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the 18th and 19th centuries, certain phases which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

Millar Burrows of Yale states, "On the whole, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record."

Joseph Free confirms that while thumbing through the book of Genesis, he mentally noted that each of the 50 chapters are either illuminated or confirmed by some archaeological discovery, and that this would be true for most of the remaining chapters of the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Nelson Glueck (a Jewish Reformed scholar and archaeologist) probably gives us the greatest support for the Bible when he states, "To date no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a single, properly understood biblical statement."

These testimonies indeed affirm vividly that the rocks themselves confirm the authenticity for the

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historicity of the Biblical accounts superbly. Let's now look at some of the examples.

(2) Old Testament Examples

(taken from McDowell's Evidences 1972:68-70):

The initial assumption by many earlier archaeologists was that the Old Testament was written not by the authors described within its text but by later historians during the much later second to sixth century BC, and then redacted back onto the great prophets such as Moses and David, etc... Many of these assumptions are no longer correct. Consider:

1) **Pentateuch:** The skeptics contended that the Pentateuch couldn't have been written by Moses, because there was no writing that early. Then the Black Stele was found with the detailed laws of *Hammurabi* which were written 300 years before Moses.

2) According to historians there were no **Hittites** at the time of Abraham. Now we know from inscriptions of that period that there was 1,200 years of Hittite civilization.

3) Historians also told us that no such people as the **Horites** existed. We find them mentioned in the genealogy of Esau in Gen.36:20. Yet now they have been discovered as a group of warriors who lived in Mesopotamia during the Patriarchal period.

4) **Abraham's name:** appears in Babylonia as a personal name at the very period of the patriarchs, though the redactionists believed he was a fictitious character.

5) **The field of Abram in Hebron:** is mentioned in 918 BC, by *Shishak* of Egypt. He had just finished warring in Palestine and inscribed on the walls of his temple at *Karnak* the name of the great patriarch, proving that even this earlier Abraham was known not in Arabia but in Palestine.

6) **The Beni Hasan Tomb:** from the Abrahamic time, depicts Asiatics coming to Egypt during a famine.

7) ***Armana tablets:** (from Egypt) mentions *Habiru* or *Apiru* in Hebrew, which was first applied to Abraham in Genesis 14:13.

8) ***Ebla tablets:** 17,000 tablets from *Tell Mardikh* in Northern Syria, from 2300 BC Shows us that a thousand years before Moses, laws, customs and events were recorded in writing in that part of the world, and that the judicial proceedings and case laws were very similar to the Deuteronomy law code (i.e. Deut.22:22-30 codes on punishment for sex offenses). One tablet mentions and lists in exact sequence the five cities of *Sodom*, *Gomorrhah*, *Admah*, *Zeboim* and *Zoar* as found in Genesis 14:8.

9) ***Mari tablets:** (from the Euphrates) mentions *Arriyuk*, or *Arioch* of Genesis 14, and lists *Nahor*, *Harran* (from Genesis 24:10), as well as the names Benjamin and *Habiru*.

10) ***Nuzi tablets:** (from Iraq) speaks about a number of customs which we find in the Pentateuch, such as:

- a) a barren wife giving a handmaiden to her husband
- b) a bride chosen for the son by the father
- c) a dowry paid to the father-in-law
- d) work done to pay a dowry (i.e. Jacob)
- e) the unchanging oral will of a father (i.e. Isaac)
- f) a father giving his daughter a slave-girl (i.e. Leah, Rachel)
- g) the sentence of death for stealing cult gods (i.e. Jacob).

11) **The doors of Sodom:** (Tell Beit Mirsim) 2200-1600 BC are heavy doors needed for security; the same which we find in Genesis 19:9. Yet, if this account had been written between 900-600 BC we would have read about arches and curtains, as security was no longer such a concern then.

12) **Joseph's price:** was 20 shekels, according to Genesis 37:28, which is the correct price for 1,700 BC. An earlier account would have been cheaper, while a later account would have been more.

13) **Joseph's Tomb:** In Joshua 24:32 speaks of Joseph's tomb. A tomb has now been found in *Shechem* with a mummy, and next to the mummy sits an Egyptian officials sword!

14) **Jericho's** excavation showed that the walls fell outwards, echoing Joshua 6:20, enabling the attackers to climb over and into the town, yet according to the laws of physics walls always fall inwards!

15) **David's** capture of Jerusalem recounted in II Samuel 5:6-8 and I Chronicles 11:6 speak of Joab using water shafts built by the *Jebusites* to surprise them and defeat them. Archaeological excavations by R.A.S. Macalister, J.G. Duncan, and Kathleen Kenyon on *Ophel* now have found these water shafts.

16) The account of **Daniel**, according to the sceptical historians would had to have been written in the second century and not the sixth century BC because of all the historical detail found in its content. Yet now the sixth century's East India Inscription corresponds with the Daniel 4:30 account of Nebuchadnezzar's building. Either way it is amazing.

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17) **Dead Sea Scrolls** written around 100 BC show us that outside of minute copying errors (which we will deal with later) it is identical to the *Massoretic Text* written in 916 AD.

18) **The Oldest Biblical Inscription** have now been identified in the Hinnom valley (across from the southern walls of Jerusalem's Old City). In 1979 two archaeologists found 1,000 items of jewelry and pottery in 9 burial caves. Two tiny silver scrolls with Biblical inscriptions rolled up in charms were also included (confirmed by the Tel Aviv archeologist Gabriel Barkay in the *Associated Press*, 1979). The inscriptions contained the oldest Biblical inscriptions ever found. They recorded the priestly blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26, which reads: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The inscriptions, which are now housed in the Israel Museum are believed to be from the seventh century BC making them 2,600 years old, and over four hundred years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls, which used to be the oldest Biblical manuscript in our possession (Grant Jeffrey's, *The Signature of God* 1996:15-16).

19) Joseph Free states: "New discoveries now show us that a host of supposed errors and contradictions are not errors at all: 'that *Sargon* existed and lived in a palatial dwelling 12 miles north of *Ninevah*, that the *Hittites* were a significant people, that the concept of a sevenfold lamp existed in the early Iron Age, that a significant city given in the record of David's empire lies far to the north, and that *Belshazzar* existed and ruled over Babylon.'"

20) Discoveries from excavations at *Nuzu, Mari and Assyrian, Hittite, Sumerian and Eshunna Codes* points out that Hebrew poetry, Mosaic legislation as well as the Hebrew social customs all fit the period and region of the patriarchs.

(3) New Testament Examples:

(taken from McDowell's *Evidences* 1972:70-73):

1) The practice of returning to one's home during a census has been corroborated by an Egyptian papyrus of that period.

2) The **Pavement** where Jesus was tried (named **Gabbatha**-John 19:13) has now been recently located in the Tower of Antonia which was the Roman military headquarters in Jerusalem.

3) The **Pool of Bethesda** has now been located while excavating near the church of St. Anne, in the N.E. quarter of the old city, which was called *Bezetha* in the 1st century AD

Yet, of particular interest to us in this discussion are the writings of **Luke**. Luke was the historian amongst the New Testament writers. Therefore, if we want to substantiate the authenticity for the New Testament account, we need to go to Luke, and find if there is any archaeological data which can corroborate his writings.

4) The Inscriptions found in Corinth confirm Paul's mention of a Hebrew Synagogue, where he debated (Acts 18:4-7), and the meat market (I Cor.10:25).

5) Luke's contention that **Lystra and Derbe** were in **Lycaonia**, and that **Iconium** was not (Acts 14:6) was contradicted by the later Roman, **Cicero**. Yet an early monument confirms Luke's contention.

6) Due to archaeological finds, most of the ancient **cities** mentioned in Acts have now been identified.

7) Paul's reference to **Erastus** the treasurer of Corinth (Romans 16:23) has been confirmed by a pavement found in 1929 bearing his name.

8) Luke's use of the word **Meris** to maintain that Philippi was a "district" of Macedonia was doubted until inscriptions were found which use this very word to describe divisions of a district.

9) *Luke's usage of **Politarchs** to denote civil authority of Thessalonica (Acts 17:6) was doubted until some 19 inscriptions have been found that make use of this title, 5 of which are in reference to Thessalonica.

10) *Luke's usage of **Praetor** to describe a Philippian ruler instead of **duumvir** has been proven accurate, as the Romans used this term for magistrates of their colonies.

11) *Luke's usage of **Proconsul** as the title for Gallio (Acts 18:12) has been corroborated by the **Delphi Inscription** (52 AD) which states, "As Lusus Junius Gallio, my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia..." Gallio only held this position for one year.

12) *Luke's mention of **Quirinius** as the governor of Syria during the birth of Jesus has now been proven accurate by an inscription from Antioch.

F.F. Bruce states, "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say that archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."

In light of archaeological evidence, books such as Luke and Acts reflect the topography and conditions of the second half of the first century AD and do not reflect the conditions of any later date.

We have no reason to fear archaeology. In fact it is this very science which has done more to

authenticate our scriptures than any other. Therefore, we encourage the secular archaeologists to dig, for as they dig we know they will only come closer to that which our scriptures have long considered to be the truth, and give us rise to claim that indeed our Bible has the right to claim true authority as the only verified Word of God.

[IV] EVIDENCES FOR THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY:

Yet for many people that is not enough. There must be other evidence beyond the Bible's claim for itself and the wealth of documentation which leads us to an assertion for not only its inspiration but for its authority. And there is, for the witness of the Bible itself testifies to its authority. Consider:

[A] Its Fulfilled Prophecies:

The Bible is authoritative because it contains fulfilled prophecy. Scripture cannot be called authentic unless it comes from the hands of God, via one of His prophets. One of the primary means for delineating the authority of any scripture is by ascertaining whether it can stand the scrutiny of prophecy; that is, whether it can tell us something about the world which only God could know, something which has not yet come to pass, but which can be verified at some future date. For instance, this was a constant difficulty for Muhammad, who, according to the Qu'ran, numerous times mentioned the distrust of others towards him due to his inability to produce a miraculous sign which would substantiate his authority (suras 10:21 and 13:7,27). In fact Muhammad could not predict anything other than a future victory, a feat not uncommon for a leader of warriors on the eve of battle.

Those predictions which cover the longest duration are the most valuable for us. Yet, according to the principle which we find in **Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 43:9; and John 13:18-21**, other predictions must be announced which are short-term, which can be verified by contemporary's of the prophet, to identify him as a prophet, and so give credibility to the longer, future predictions.

The Bible is replete with fulfilled predictions. In the paper Muhammad, a Christian Apologetic we offered Biblical examples concerning Moses and Isaiah, showing how they made prophecies which were fulfilled immediately, or the next day (Defeat of Egyptians=Exodus 14:13-14,27-28, holding the sun back=Isaiah 38:5-8 and Sennacherib's rout=Isaiah 37:21-38), and others which were fulfilled between 150-200 years later, or even centuries later; and others that are just now being fulfilled (Israelites to Babylon=Isaiah 39:6-7; blessing/curses for Israel=Deuteronomy 28:1,15,64-66; 30:1,4-5; the fall of babylon=Isaiah 13:1,19-20; and the return from exile=Isaiah 11:11-12).

[B] Its extraordinary Unity and Harmony:

Another evidence for the Bible's authority is its extraordinary unity and harmony. The Bible, made up of the Old and New Testament, consists of sixty six books, written by more than thirty prophets and apostles, and written in times of tremendous change and diversity, spanning more than 1,500 years. Yet it holds to a common unifying idea throughout; that God is at work in history with the intent to redeem and save humanity from death, and thereby bring them back into relationship with Him, as had been intended from before creation.

That so many individuals from so many different backgrounds, over such a long time, could agree on just one unifying though important theme with such consistency and coherency speaks not to the work of mere mortals, but points to the divine intervention of God Himself. No other book or scripture can even come close to making the same claim.

[C] Its amazing Circulation:

But that is not all. The amazing circulation of the Bible augments its authority. According to the latest figures, the whole Bible has been translated into some 260 existing languages, while the New Testament has been translated into 580 more. A further 920 languages have some portion of the Scripture. This means that today, 93% of the world's population can read the Bible in their mother tongue (!)

In fact, at this moment there is a translation going on in 1167 languages! It is estimated that the New Testament is published in an additional language every two weeks, and that every 10 days or so, work leading to a new scripture translation is commencing in another language somewhere in the world. At this rate it will take just 60 years before all groups of peoples will have a portion of scripture in their own mother tongue (!).

Is it therefore, no surprise that the Bible continues to be the best-selling book in the history of humanity! For instance, according to the latest statistics available, in 1988 the Bible Society alone distributed

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nearly 700 million Scripture portions, over 14 million Bibles, and nearly 13 million New Testaments in over 100 countries (!) Somewhere behind all those figures speaks clearly of a God who desires to see His word shared to every nation, tribe, people and language.

[D] Its Appeal to all Classes everywhere:

The appeal of the Bible to all classes everywhere points also to its authority. God's first command to Adam was to be fruitful and multiply. His second command to Adam was to "fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule..." (Genesis 1:28).

At the beginning of this century, in 1900, there were only 558 million Christians in the world. In another five years, in 2,000 AD there will be an estimated 2,020 million (2.2 billion) Christians. Over a quarter of them will live in South America (565 million). Another quarter will be in Europe (547 million), with 390 million in Africa, another 255 million in North America and 250 million in Asia (!) Outside of Asia, with its enormous population, this gives us a pretty even distribution of population, representing both the rich and poor countries around the world. Does this not show the universal appeal to God's scriptures?

In the southern half of Africa, as well as most of both North and South America, and the majority of the European nations, Christianity will continue to be the most popular religion. Thus, only in the Muslim world, Hindu India, and in Communist China will the Bible not have much influence.

[E] Its Wisdom and high Moral Teaching:

The wisdom and moral teachings found in the Bible, which have historically been used as a basis of law and moral teaching around the world points to its authority. The Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, as well as the Sermon on the Mount are just a few examples of Biblical laws which are used as principles adopted by most societies today as a foundation for proper practice.

The Bible is the only holy book in circulation today which gives **principles** (not just legalistic laws and rigid regulations) that cover all areas of life (social, economic, political, as well as religious). From the creation in Genesis, to the Psalms of David and the Songs of Solomon, on through to the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, and the teachings of Paul in Romans and his epistles, we find the inspired wisdom of God reaching out to instruct and warn those who open its pages. It is no wonder, then, that so many, though they often choose not to follow it, still respect its authority and content, and look to it as a last resort in times of crisis.

What is unique is that these principles can be, and are, re-interpreted for each culture and period in history, so that the Christian faith not only becomes an applicable set of beliefs which promises us eternal life with God after we die, but it gives us patterns (universal and absolute) by which we can live our lives on earth while we wait ("steak on our plate while we wait rather than pie in the sky when we die").

What I find intriguing are the many examples of non-Christian countries today who have borrowed the Biblically inspired societal and ethical laws which have come to them, ironically, via the experience of colonialism (i.e. Hindu India, or Muslim Senegal), or out of appreciation for their practicality in today's world (i.e. Japan which has no colonial history, yet has modeled its laws on the U.S. constitution, which is itself modeled on Biblical principles).

Take the example of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (taken from Jan Hjarpe's article titled: "The Contemporary Debate in the Muslim World on the definition of 'Human Rights'", in K. Ferdinand & M. Mozaffari (eds.), Islam: State and Society, 1988). Here is a secular document which the modern world today has formulated as a standard for all nations and peoples to live by. As we look through the articles we find a definite Biblical thread leaving its imprint, in almost direct contrast to the more severe Shari'ah laws promulgated by Islamic governments.

Article 4 prohibits slavery. The only abolition movements were created and headed up by Christians in Europe and America (i.e. "the underground railway" in the U.S., the "Clapham Sect" in England), or missionaries serving in Africa (i.e. the creation of Sierra Leone for freed slaves). There has never been an abolition movement in Islam, because the Qur'an contains rules for slaves, their rights, and the slave trade, so that the non-slave status is in itself not a 'Human Right.'

Article 5 states that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." While the Bible specifically forbids the use of violence (Matthew 5:39; 26:52; Luke 6:27-31; and I Corinthians 13), the Qur'an stipulates amputations, floggings, and stonings for punishment (*Hudud*) of a variety of offenses (i.e. Article 61 in Iran's constitution allows these three punishments).

Articles 7,8,10 states that all are equal before the law. While the Bible maintains that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), the same can not be said of Shari'ah law. This law makes distinctions between the status of Muslim and non-Muslims in

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legal matters (i.e. the *wergild*, or the price to be paid for the murder of a Muslim versus that of a non-Muslim Dhimmi is in the proportion of 10 to 1, while between men and women it is 2 to 1).

Article 16 allows men and women, irregardless of religion to marry and have families, and to have equal rights for divorce. While this is pretty much parallel with the Biblical understanding of marriage (outside of the admonition to not be “unequally yoked,” as well as the prohibition by Paul that all church leaders must have one wife, and must not divorce), the Shari’ah law prohibits marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, and gives the man (but not the woman) an unconditional right to divorce.

Article 18 insists that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion: this right includes freedom to change his or her religion or belief...” The Bible categorically affirms this article (John 3:16), as it is God's desire that every individual has the right to choose or reject Him (Romans 10:9-15). Islam prohibits, customarily by capital punishment, apostasy, and enjoins Muslims to fight those who do not believe in Allah until they acquiesce (see Suras 8:39; 9:5, 29; and 47:4).

Ironically, in its attempt to secularize its society, Turkey, in article 24 of its constitution, has made illegal the notion of religious law as a law for society, and so has forbidden the use of certain titles, garments and outfits, as well as religious propaganda which then is contrary to article 18 of the UN Declaration.

Article 19 permits the freedom of opinion and expression. While the Bible has little to say concerning censorship (it simply prohibits anyone from changing scripture in Revelation 22:18-19), past and present history has demonstrated that Muslim governments have had a total limitation of the freedom for expression and of the press.

An example of the loss of the freedom of expression is noted in the recent cases in Pakistan where over 20 Christians and hundreds of Ahmadis have been imprisoned under the ‘Section 295-C blasphemy law’. The Blasphemy law was only applied to Islam, and stipulated that no-one could say anything against the prophet or his family. In 1980 the punishment was three years in prison. In 1982 criticism of the Qur’an was added to the law. By 1986 the punishment was increased to life imprisonment. Then in 1990 the law stipulated that words, innuendo and even insinuation against Muhammad or the Qur’an, on the witness of one good Muslim, would be punishable by life imprisonment or death. Today the punishment is death. One may say that England has a blasphemy law as well, applied to Christianity alone. Yet, who has been punished under the law? No-one, nor will the law ever be used, as it is barbaric and unworkable. On the other hand, many are punished in the Islamic state of Pakistan and have been imprisoned because of this blasphemy law, such as the boy Salamat Masih, the bangle vendor Chand Bakhat, Gul Masih, Mohammad Arshad Javaid and many more. Others have even been killed (i.e. the paraplegic watch-repairer Tahir Iqbal, the teacher Naimat Ahmer, and the laborer Bando Masih) (from the Pakistani journal “Newsline” November/December 1993, pgs.24-36B), and all for the simple reason that they allegedly ‘criticized the prophet.’ This points out just how dangerous it is for non-Muslims to criticize Islam.

Article 21 declares that “everyone has the right of equal access to public service...and that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government...” The Bible (in the New Testament) specifically separates the realm of church and state, and thus puts the authority of the state into the hands of the people set there by God as His “servants,” rather than letting the church take on that responsibility (see Romans 13:1-7). In Islam an affiliation to Islam is often regarded as a prerequisite for certain higher posts in the administration of the state. In fact only a Muslim may carry the highest office, that of caliph.

What we notice in all this is the tendency by ‘secular’ governments today to borrow the very Biblical principles which they attempted to distance themselves from in order to maintain a truly “secular” set of laws and guidelines. It is because of the universal application of the Biblical law that they have been forced to borrow that which they no longer hold to be authoritative.

On the other hand, increasingly we are bombarded with an invigorated Islamic conservatism stipulating the need to return to the canonized Qur’anic understanding of law. This view holds that the Law of God is above all other laws; that since God is the creator of Man, His law must be “Human rights” by definition.

Yet, ironically, in most parts of the Muslim world there exists, as a legacy from the colonial era, a more or less secular legal system applied in nearly all the domains, with the common exception that of family law (Hjarpe 1988:30). The Muslims in their own countries have had to fall back on Biblical principles of law due to the impracticality of imposing 7th-9th century “inspired” *shari’ah* laws within a 20th century setting (i.e. the impossibility of Pakistan's punitive amputations, and urban families vs. rural inheritance laws). This point alone has special significance. Any scripture which claims to come from God must therefore have universal application in all cultures, both at the time of its revelation as well as throughout history, including the present.

Most of the modern world acclaims, by voluntary choice, the applicability of Biblical principles in the

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20th century, even though many times they fail to live up to those ideals in practice. By contrast, there are no Muslim countries who can claim to live by the strict Islamic directives found in the Qur'an. This is true even in those countries where they have gained absolute control, or where they have been able to influence domestic laws for their own communities. The excuse always given is that Muslim countries today are led by irreligious and incompetent Muslims, and if only there were real Muslims in power we would see a stricter code of Islamic practice enforced, which would do away with all of the 20th century problems, such as poverty, crime, and moral decay.

In response, could we not say that Western countries are, likewise, led by irreligious and incompetent people, many of whom make no claim to be Christians? Yet, the Biblical principles which are still evident and practised in our western laws manage to bring about a just and democratic society, which in turn allows for an improved economic environment, the envy of which is best exemplified by the millions of Muslims who would love to live within its jurisdiction if given the chance, and the thousands who actually do? A case of Rex-Lex versus Lex-Rex.

[F] Its life-changing power:

Finally, the evidence for the Bible's authority is best exemplified by its life-changing power. Christians make an increasing impact on societies through the spreading of the Bible in the world. Though 66,000 people die each day (around 46 each minute) without hearing about the Bible, missionaries are trying hard to reach those who still remain, travelling to all corners of the earth to share the gospel with those who have not heard its message. As a result there are now 138,500 Protestant missionaries working to spread the message of the Bible around the world (85,000 from North America, 35,000 from other western countries, and 30,000 from non-western countries (Johnstone *Operation World*, 1993:404). Because of their ongoing work 3,500 new churches are being planted every week. Yet even more impressive is the figure which reveals that as a result of their efforts **70,000 people receive Christ daily!** In fact, in comparison with Islam, the conversion rate of Evangelical Protestants is double that of Islam (5% for Evangelicals versus only 2.5% for Islam) (Johnstone 1993:183).

One need only go into any Christian book shop to see the myriad of testimonials by those who have given their hearts to Christ because of the truth they found within the pages of the Bible, to find proof of its changing power. **Never in the history of humanity have so many been affected so much, by so few, and all because of the life-changing power which the Bible has for those who seek its truth.**

What, then does this tell us about the Bible's authority? Can we say that our scriptures are authoritative though they have not come to us as direct pronouncements from God (what the Muslims claim as *nazil*)? Indeed we can. Though Muslims, like us, admit that God works via His prophets and apostles, they have difficulty accepting that God would permit the writers to use their own personalities and experiences to explain God's transcendent ideas within the limited understanding of His creation, His children on earth. Ironically, the Bible, considered the work of finite, though inspired men, ranks far above the Qur'an as a recognized literary masterpiece, a book which Muslims believe comes unpolluted by human interference.

Yet, the best evidence for the Bible is not its literary qualities but the proven claims which it makes. The Bible speaks clearly of its inspiration, as does the testimony which the Bible provides in its fulfilled prophecy, in its unity and harmony, its amazing circulation to all classes of people everywhere, in its wisdom and high moral teachings, as well as its practical laws and principles, and finally, in its life-changing power.

If God truly created the world for His pleasure, He would have created it to work to a pattern. This pattern we would expect to find revealed in His word; as indeed it is. It should not surprise us, then, that, according to the latest statistics, Christianity, because it holds the repository of Biblical principles and thinking, is the fastest conversion-growing religion in the world today (Johnstone 1993:183). What better testimony could one ask to demonstrate the Bible's claim to be the only revealed and inspired Word of God.

[II Timothy 3:16]

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[IV] ANSWERING THE CRITICS

We now move on to specific difficulties which Muslims have with our scriptures. I don't think there is a Christian who has not felt frustration and sometimes humiliation when talking with a Muslim concerning the validity of their scriptures, or its authority. Too many times the conversations lead to the oft-spoken belief by Muslims that our scriptures are no longer reliable, which insinuates that what we believe in is no longer reliable as well.

Yet, in reality, it is more likely that it is their perception of our scriptures which is no longer reliable, since much of what they believe concerning our scriptures comes from misguided, ill-informed and out-dated sources.

We have already dealt with three areas of contention, that of revelation, inspiration, and an historical analysis, and have come to the conclusion that due to our differences of interpretation, what we as Christians look for as God's revelation and inspiration as well as the ongoing historical critique does not parallel at all with that of the Muslims. As a result, both parties end up judging the other's scriptures by using their own criteria. It is not surprising, then, that the two sides cannot see eye-to-eye. What, then, are the criticisms Muslims level at our scriptures, and how can we best answer these criticisms?

[A] Common Misconceptions:

As we move through this paper it will soon become apparent that many of the problems between our two faiths find their root in common misconceptions Muslims have concerning our scriptures. Let's look at four of their misconceptions:

(1) The New Testament is a newer or changed version of the Old Testament

There is a considerable degree of ignorance among Muslims regarding the character of the Christian Bible, especially in respect to its two major sections, the Old and New Testament.

Many Muslims assume we have two contradicting Testaments, and that the very existence of the New Testament presupposes that the Old Testament has been changed; that the former is a corrupted version of the latter. In fact, many Muslims believe that the real Old Testament, presumed to be the original scripture, no longer exists in its original form and has been interpolated by the New Testament, manipulated by the earlier church, or by Paul and his associates.

Similarly, they confuse the definition we give for our gospels, assuming we have four variant and contradicting versions of the New Testament, one written by Matthew, another written by Mark and so on... They wonder why God is not able to reveal His Truths adequately and comprehensively to one individual. Why does he require four?

These accusations underline the ignorance of the basic structure of the Bible, which presupposes an equally extensive ignorance of its contents. As long as Muslims continue to believe these illusions, accepting that such claims may appear to support the Muslim contention that the Bible has been changed, they will invite suspicion, as the very veracity for their illusion requires false notions for its support.

To begin with the Old and New Testaments are not tampered copies of each other, but rather are two entirely separate books. We dare not throw one out in lieu of the other. It is the entire 66 books (including the 39 from the Old Testament and 27 from the New) which constitute the Christian Bible.

Even the Qur'an itself mentions the distinction between the Old and New Testament, referring to one as the *Taurat* in Sura 5:43, the scriptures of the Jews, and to the other as the *Injil* in Sura 5:47, the scripture of the Christians. Thus, Muhammad was aware that the Jews and Christians possessed two different scriptures. In Sura 7:157 the Qur'an admits that the Jews and Christians were in possession of the *Taurat* and the *Injil* at the time of Muhammad, and that they were those books which these two groups themselves accepted as the Law and the Gospel respectively. Muslims who claim that the New Testament is a changed version of the Old Testament are therefore simply out of touch with their own holy book, the Qur'an. The Old Testament is the title Christians give to the Jewish Scriptures. We accept it as the unchanged, authentic word of God dating from the times of the prophets of whom it speaks (such as Moses, David, and others).

Muslims, rather than dismissing the Old Testament as a collection of inauthentic historical writings, would do well to understand the importance which the Old Testament holds in introducing and preparing the world to receive The Redeemer of the world, the promised Messiah.

The Old Testament prophets recognized that the redemption for the world would be fulfilled through this Messiah (Jeremiah 31:31,33). Thus, they prophesied His coming hundreds of times, even speaking specifically of when and where His birth would occur, why He would come, how He would die, and that He

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would physically rise again; all hundreds of years before the events.

The New Testament, on the other hand, is the historical record of the manner in which God fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, and established the new covenant. It contains the account of the life and teachings of the Messiah (the Gospels), the creation of the Church (Acts of the Apostles), an explanation of Christian beliefs and conduct (Epistles), and a description of the end times, when God's purpose for humanity will be fulfilled (Revelation). Understood in its entirety, its truth and its unity with the Old Testament Messianic message gives credibility to the Old Testament Scriptures which came before.

If Muslims would take the time to read both the Old and New Testament, they would not only see these prophecies clearly revealed, but just as clearly, see their fulfilment in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Until they read and understand the entire scope of scripture, from the beginning of creation to the end of God's work on earth, they would do well not to criticize its makeup.

How then should we answer the accusation that we have changed the Old Testament? To begin with, we need to set straight a common misunderstanding concerning the high view we hold towards God's Word. Unlike the Muslims, Christians do not believe that God's Word can ever be changed or corrupted, though it can be mis-copied, mis-translated and interpreted incorrectly. Therefore, we accept the Old Testament as the unchanged, genuine Word of God of pre-Christian times. Though it was written from 400-1,400 years before the New Testament, and is four times as long, it nonetheless is equally valid for us as Christians as God's inspired Word.

One must remember that the Old Testament has been carefully guarded by the Jews since before the time of Jesus. Thus, it is held to be the Word of God by two very different religions and has been scrupulously maintained by each one independently of the other. If one group had attempted to alter the Old Testament in any way, it would obviously have immediately been exposed by the other. Muslims must take that into account before making such rash accusations.

There are other evidences as well. The entire Old Testament text was translated from the original Hebrew into the Greek (known as the *Septuagint*) roughly two centuries before the time of Christ, so that it was widely circulated in the Greek-speaking world before Christ was born. To this day it is thoroughly consistent with our Old Testament, as well as the oldest Hebrew *Massoretic* texts which the Jews have had in their possession for over 1,000 years (since 916 AD).

Furthermore, the Dead Sea Scrolls, written some decades before Christ's birth (from 2nd century BC, to 1st cent. AD - McDowell 99:77), and discovered shortly after the 2nd World War, also parallel almost exactly the Old Testament Septuagint and Massoretic texts which we have today (i.e. Isaiah scroll is dated 125 BC, yet of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only 17 letters are in question; 10 are a matter of spelling, 4 are conjunction changes, while the remaining 3 are the word 'light', added to verse 11, which doesn't change the meaning; so that in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one 3-letter word in question after 1,000 years. With the rest of Isaiah, 95% is word-for-word identical, and the remaining 5% is made up of obvious slips of the pen or variations in spelling [McDowell 99:78-79]).

We, therefore, not only have an independent translation into Greek, but also a number of handwritten texts in the original Hebrew, both of which predate the Christian era when the New Testament was written. Thus, it becomes almost impossible to believe that Christians could have changed it at any time in their history. There is now and has always been too much evidence available to try to suggest that the Old Testament has been changed or corrupted by Christians.

The Old and New Testament are separate yet complementing books. Muslims would do well to read the two books rather than base false assumptions that the Bible has been changed on their illusions about their content.

(2) Doesn't the New Testament abrogate the Old Testament?

Many Muslims have asked whether the New Testament, because it comes later, abrogates the Old Testament, much as the Qur'an, which is a later revelation, supposedly abrogates the Old and New Testaments, taken from their own perspective on abrogation, that a later verse can abrogate an earlier verse (Nasukh vs. Mansukh verses) and then applying such a criteria to scripture, suggesting that something was wrong with the first, forcing its replacement with another better revelation, which then would be replaced by the final and better revelation, the Qur'an.? The answer is an emphatic NO! The fact is that the two books deal with two distinct covenants made by God, one through Moses and the other through Jesus. Probably the best verses which describe this idea are those written in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here we find the prophecy of the new covenant, a covenant whose laws will be in the **minds** and written on the **hearts** of the believers, and will replace that of the Old Covenant, which was a covenant written on **stone** with many rules and regulations.

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The old covenant, given by God to Moses had been put aside, and the new covenant, made through Jesus, had come into being for the salvation of all who believed in Him. This is why we call our scriptures the New Testament, because it outlines the enactment and fulfilment of the old covenant. We call the former scriptures the Old Testament for the same reason, namely that they contain the record of the old covenant. That covenant was eventually abolished and the new covenant was introduced in its place, by means of “progressive revelation.” This form of revelation simply means that God chose to reveal to mankind, over a period of time (roughly 1,500 years), His truth in an “evolving” form so that they could understand and accept it, as they matured over the generations. This is similar to what a parent does with their child, changing the discipline, the rules and regulations for that child as they grow older and mature; as Paul says in Hebrews, “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

The abrogation was thus not in the scriptures, but in the covenant contained in the Old Testament. No alteration, corruption or substitution of the Old Testament scriptures by the New Testament has ever taken place. All that has happened is that the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant, a replacement which the Old Testament itself declared and anticipated (see Ezekiel 36:26-27).

(3) Why should we trust the Bible since it has been corrupted?

A common misconception by Muslims of our Bible stems from the very real and numerous contradictions which are evident between the Bible and the Qur'an (i.e. the accounts of Cain and Abel, Abraham, Solomon and Sheba, Jesus's birth, heaven and hell, etc...). Muslims are equally aware that two supposedly authoritative yet contradictory books cannot both claim to be from God. Therefore, they declare that additions and corruptions have crept into the Bible due to tampering by the Jews and Christians over the years (commonly known as *Tahrif*). While this argument is popularly accepted by many Muslims today, it was not considered by the early compilers of the Islamic Traditions in the 9th and 10th centuries, at least up until the 11th century, when Ibn Hazam, in 1064 AD first suggested that the Bible was corrupted. In fact, few that I have talked with have ever attempted to point out where these corruptions are, or when and how they could have been made. On top of that there simply are too many difficulties maintaining this position. Consider:

a) The Qur'an gives authority to the Bible:

The Qur'an, itself, the highest authority for all Muslims, gives authority to the Bible, assuming its authenticity at least up to the seventh-ninth centuries.

Consider the following Suras:

Sura Baqara **2:136** points out that there is no difference between the scriptures which preceded and those of the Qur'an, saying, “...*the revelation given to us...and Jesus...we make no difference between one and another of them.*” Sura Al-i-Imran **3:2-3** continues, “*Allah...He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)...as a guide to mankind.*” Sura Nisaa **4:136** carries this further by admonishing the Muslims to, “...*Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture which He sent before him.*”

In Sura Ma-ida **5:47-49,50-52** we find a direct call to Christians to believe in their scriptures: “...*We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel... Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein, if any do fail to judge by the light of what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel...*” Again, in Sura Ma-ida **5:68** we find a similar call: “*People of the Book!...Stand fast by the law, the Gospel, and all revelation that hath come to you from your Lord. It is the revelation that has come to thee from thy Lord.*”

To embolden this idea of the New and Old Testament's authority we find in Sura **10:94** that Muslims are advised to confer with these scriptures if in doubt about their own, saying: “*If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee. The truth had indeed come to thee from thy Lord.*” And as if to emphasize this point the advice is repeated in Sura **21:7**, stating, “...*the apostles We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration. If ye realize this not, Ask of those who possess the message.*”

Finally, in Sura Ankabut **29:46** Muslims are asked not to question the authority of the scriptures of the Christians, saying, “*And dispute ye not with the people of the book but say: We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and that which came down to you.*”

If there is an overlying theme in these Suras which is clear, it is that the Qur'an emphatically endorses the Torah and the Gospel as revelations from God. This coincides with what Christians believe, as well.

Note: There are many Muslims who contend that according to sura 2:140 the Jews and Christians have corrupted their scriptures. This aya says (referring to the Jews and Christians), “...*who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from Allah...?*” Nowhere does this aya state that the Jews and Christians corrupted their scriptures. It merely mentions that they have **concealed** “*the testimony they have from Allah.*”

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In other words the testimony is still there (thus the reason the afore-mentioned suras admonish Muslims to respect the former scriptures), though the adherents of that testimony (in this case, the Jews) have chosen to conceal it.

b) God does not change His Word:

Furthermore, both the Christian scriptures and the Muslim Qur'an hold to the premise that **God does not change His word**. He does not change His revelation (despite the law of abrogation found in the Qur'an: Sura Al Baqarah 2:106). Sura Yunus **10:64** says, "*No change can there be in the words of Allah.*" This is reflected in Sura Al An'am **6:34**: "*There is none that can alter the words of Allah,*" and repeated in Sura Qaf **50:28,29**.

In the scriptures we, likewise, have a number of references which speak of the unchangeability of God's word; such as, Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35; and Revelation 22:18-20.

Why should a Jew or a Christian, before the time of Muhammad, be interested in changing God's revelation? Does he or she want to go to hell? (Revelations 22:18-19). The only conceivable reason for changing a document would be to discredit a competing document. This is what Muslims claim Christians have done.

Left unsaid by Muslims is the puzzling question as to how both the Jews and the Christians would have known simultaneously where and what to change in each of their corresponding scriptures, so that they would be in total agreement with each other, as they have been for the last 2,000 years!

This would indeed be an amazing conspiracy, especially when one considers that the earliest manuscript portions of the Old Testament can be dated to the 2nd century BC (Dead Sea Scrolls), or the fact that there were over 230 New Testament manuscripts (or portions) located throughout the known world before the seventh century when the Qur'an supposedly was revealed. Furthermore, we can point to over 36,000 direct quotations of the New Testament in the early Church fathers letters before the 4th century, as well as 15,000 translations written in thirteen languages, and around 2,000 lectionaries used by the 6th century churches, all of which would have had to be found and changed without the knowledge of their owners. Even more incredible, the changes and corruptions would have all had to be carried out hundreds of years before the Qur'an was even in existence! How would the Jews and Christians have anticipated what needed to be changed, let alone the fact that changes were even required? That indeed would be a supernatural feat!

One wonders, therefore, why Muslims continue to claim that the Bible is corrupt? "When," we ask, could the Bible have been polluted? "How" could it have been done, and "what" would have been the incentive?

One must also ask why the Qur'an does not clearly state that the Bible was corrupted? Certainly if the Qur'an has divine origins its author/s would have known of the corruptions and would have warned the Muslims of these corruptions. We find no aya which speaks of or warns of such corruptions of the previous scriptures. In fact, since the first Islamic reference to any Biblical corruptions do not even appear until Ibn Hazam mentions it in 1064 AD, suggesting that this argument is a very late 11th century polemic, it intimates that such an accusation was never considered worthy by the earliest compilers of the traditions of the prophet at all.

If Muslims continue to claim that our Scriptures have been corrupted, they have an enormous responsibility to show from what time in history it happened, where these corruptions exist in the text (the task of textual criticism), and why they were never warned of such corruptions by their revelation, the Qur'an, or by their own prophet, Muhammad, or by the later compilers of the prophetic traditions. Indeed, God would never allow his revelations to be manipulated so easily by men; on this both scriptures agree.

(4) Doesn't the Jesus Seminar proves the Bible's corruption?

There are those Muslims who back up their allegations by quoting "Christian scholars" who advocate that much of the existing Gospels had been added to by the disciples of Christ within the first 60 years after his death. A popular example often quoted by the Muslims to back up their accusations, is that of the Jesus Seminar, a group, made up of 74 largely liberal New Testament 'theologians', mostly from Harvard, Claremont, or Vanderbilt divinity schools, organized in 1985 by Robert W. Funk, who have attempted, in the last 15 years to discredit much of the Gospel as we know it (Geisler BECA:386).

Muslims, however, should be careful before quoting from these supposed "Christian scholars," as the presupposition with which these "scholars" work does as much damage to their belief in Jesus Christ as a prophet, a healer and a teacher, as it does to the Christian's belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Muslims would be horrified if the Qur'an was dissected in the same manner by these same liberal scholars.

The Jesus Seminar starts from the premise that if a saying by Jesus could have been uttered by his

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contemporaries, or is demonstrably in line with later church teaching, it must not have come from him, but was either borrowed from existing individuals or was created by the church. They assume late dates for the New Testament writings, and thereby credit much of its material from 2nd century writings, including the infamous Gnostic 'Gospel of Thomas', which they put alongside the four canonical gospels. With this criteria these "scholars" have excised 82% of Jesus's sayings, and claim that the remaining material is either doubtfully authentic (16%), or can absolutely be regarded as Jesus' actual words (only 15 sayings, or a pitiful 2%) (McDowell 99:563).

And they haven't stopped there. Because of their anti-supernatural bias, they are currently excising all of Jesus's miracles, except for a few 'psychosomatic' healings, since from their humanistic standpoint the supernatural cannot exist, as it cannot be rationally explained or proven. Thus they consider the miracles odious, and so, suspect. What is left are only those saying and acts which a normal, first century Jewish Rabbi would utter. One would hardly recognize him as a prophet, let alone the Son of God.

What the Muslims fail to understand is that this group of scholars is doing much the same thing that many redactionists have been guilty of in the past; namely, they have gone to a particular document with a set of presuppositions, in this case a humanistic or naturalistic outlook, and have interpreted the document using that criteria.

Muslims are guilty of this as well, as I have pointed out earlier. The view that our Bible is corrupt since it contradicts their Qur'an is a good example. The modus operandi in use here is that the Qur'an must be the standard as it supposedly is the more authoritative, due to its 'untouched' and late revelation.

Obviously, we as Christians cannot agree. Not only is the premise wrong, but the conclusions fail to take into consideration the wealth of evidence which supports the veracity for our scriptures.

(5) Isn't the Gospel of Barnabas the real Gospel?

A common misconception which continues to make the rounds today in Muslim circles is that the real Gospel of Jesus is and has been around since the first century. This "gospel" is that of Barnabas, a member of the later body of disciples, and also the companion of Paul.

Muslims like this gospel because it claims Jesus did not die, but was substituted by Judas Iscariot (sect.#217), paralleling the Qur'anic view (Sura 4:157).

But could this be the true gospel which supercedes all the other four gospel accounts? Let's take a look:

The only manuscript of The Gospel of Barnabas was first discovered in the Papal library around 1590 AD, and the current assumption is that it was written by an Italian between 1400-1500 AD (Geisler 99:67). The first time in which it was quoted was during the Muslim-Christian controversy, by Toland in 1747, and was then called "The Muslim Gospel." In fact there is no reference to it by any Muslim writer before the 15th or 16th century, which is curious, since Muslims and Christians were in heated debate since the 7th century, and a document such as this would have come in handy in such disputes.

It is quite evident that it is nothing more than a fraudulent invention of the 15th or 16th century, written with the intention of discrediting Jesus and the gospels for the sake of Muhammad and Islam. The shocking ignorance by the author concerning both the gospels and the Qur'an can be seen throughout the account, including serious errors involving first century Palestinian history and geography, and customs and ideas which were not known until a later date, proving that it is not an original document from the time of Christ and his disciples.

Consider these problems in the text:

1) The author calls himself an apostle and inserts himself among the dozen disciples, omitting the name of Thomas from the twelve (#14). He claims the special attention of Jesus towards himself, a testimony of remarkable pride in direct contrast to the humility evidenced by the true evangelists (#s 19,25,72, 83,88,100,101,109,218,219,221).

Ironically, the author has failed to do his homework, for Barnabas was never associated with Jesus during his lifetime. Instead his association was with Paul, after Jesus was no longer among the 12.

2) The author shows his ignorance of the Greek, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic, when Barnabas twice calls Jesus "Chrissto," yet in #42 and #96 etc. he denies that his Jesus is "the Messiah," even though "Christ" in Greek is the exact translation of the "Messiah" in Hebrew.

3) It is evident that the author either did not know the account of Jesus' birth well, or that he wrote the account in a hurry: In #3, Joseph, upon arriving in Bethlehem finds no place to rest, so he lodges Mary outside the town, where she delivers Jesus. Yet, in #4 the angel announces to the shepherds that a prophet of the Lord is born in the town of David. The shepherds then go to Bethlehem, and find the infant outside the town,

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according to the word of the angel. In #6, during the arrival of the wise-men in Jerusalem, Herod asks his scribes where the Christ must be born. They respond: in Bethlehem, as was written by the prophet. Finally, in #7, the wise men arrive in Bethlehem, where they find the star above a hotel outside the town, where Jesus was born. Here we find 5 contradictions within 5 paragraphs!

4) In #10, at the age of 30, on the mountain of olives, in the presence of his mother, according to the author, Jesus receives the gospel from the angel Gabriel (gospel means “the subject of”...Jesus). In #4 the angel announces to the shepherds: “I announce to you a great joy, that is born in the town of David, a prophet.” In Luke 2:10 we find written: “I bring you good news of great joy” (in Greek=euangelion). Neither Barnabas nor Muhammed understood that the gospel is the accomplishment of the coming of the promised Messiah, (see Gal.3:8; 4:4).

5) When a priest asks Jesus if he is the **Messiah** for whom they wait (#42, 48, 96-97), the author has Barnabas respond: “I am not him, because he was before me and will come after me; I am not worthy to undo his shoes; Muhammed is his glorious name!” Thus Barnabas contradicts at the same time John 1:19-29, and the Qur'an 3:33-42 and 5:19, 75, where John, son of Zachariah, is identified as the announcer of the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary (The common title of Jesus used in the Qur'an 3:39,45).

6) In the New Testament, Jesus demonstrated his identity with God by his miracles (Jn.10:30-38); consequently the Pharisees accused him of using the power of Beelzebub, the prince of Demons (Matt.12:24). The author of Barnabas repeats this story (#69) yet recounts that Jesus chased out the demons “by the power and in the name of God, our Lord;” and so the accusation makes little sense.

7) Pretending that Jesus refused to be called God or the Son of God (#70 etc.), the author of Barnabas seeks to explain the origin of this appellation, finally attributing in to the Jews (#93) and also to the Romans (#69,91).

8) Contradictions are a problem for the author. In #33 the only unpardonable sin is idolatry, but in #69 it is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

9) The author of Barnabas inserts some fifteenth century customs in his supposed recitation of the first century.

a) *In #42 and 97 Jesus wears shoes, the kind invented for the cold climates of Italy in the fifteenth century, but unknown in Palestine in the first century.

b) *In #152, the wine-growers cleaned their barrels by rolling them on the ground. But the technology needed for creating wooden barrels did not exist in Palestine during the first century. Instead, wine was stored in earthen vases or goat-skins. The barrel, in fact, was invented quite a bit later (around the 10th cent.), not in Palestine, but in Europe.

c) *In #82, Barnabas writes of a “Jubilee of 100 years” at Jerusalem. In Lev.25:8-34 the Jubilee is depicted for 50 years, and was always kept for that period of time, except for once, in 1343 AD, when the pope Boniface VIII instituted a jubilee of 100 years. This was later returned to the original time allotment of 50 years by Clement VI.

10) The author of Barnabas shows his ignorance of geography and of personalities of Palestine, which he should have known had he lived there, during the time of Christ, which we know the true Barnabas did.

a) *In #20-21, Jesus is shown to traverse the Sea of Galilee where he disembarks at Nazareth, and then walks up to Capernaum. In reality, Nazareth is found in the mountains, more than 25 kilometers from the Sea, and it is Capernaum which is next to the Sea.

b) In #3, Pilate is named as the governor, and Ananias and Caiaphus are named as priests at the birth of Jesus. In fact, Pilate governed from 26-36 years after the birth of Jesus Christ, while Ananias was the chief sacrificer from 7-15 years after the birth of Jesus, but also associated with the priest of his brother-in-law, Caiaphus, from 18-36 years after Jesus.

11) The author of Barnabas seems to know the apocryphal traditions of both Christianity and Islam better than he knows the Bible or the Qur'an.

a) In #35 Muhammad was created 60,000 years before all other things, and in #41 paradise was created for him. Yet, in the Qur'an, Suras: 28:44; 4:162-164; and 38:69-73 we find that Muhammad wasn't at creation, nor was Moses, and he doesn't know what will happen to him.

b) In #106 hell is made up of snow and ice. Compare and contrast this with Matt.25:41, Rev.20:10 in the Bible and Sura 92:14 where hell is of fire.

c) In #11 and 19, Jesus denies that he could heal, saying that he is but a man like all others. He also admits that he cannot create in #95. Compare and contrast these with Sura 5:110; Isaiah 35:4-6; and Luke 7:18-22, where all these abilities are attributed to Jesus.

12) In #52 and 91 Jesus predicts that men who are in the service of Satan would corrupt his gospel.

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This is in direct contradiction to what the scriptures say: Matt.5:18; and 24:35, and contradicts the Qur'an as well: 4:135-136; 3:2-3; 5:47-51; 18:26-27; and 50:27-29. The Qur'an specifically says that God's word cannot be corrupted.

13) In #217 all the disciples believe that Judas was Jesus at the cross. The author of Barnabas mentions that Jesus had predicted that he would be taken up and that another would die in his place. Thus the disciples concealed him and hid the body of Judas, and went about preaching that Jesus had risen. One needs to ask why the disciples would be willing to give their lives for a belief they knew was false.

One needs to ask how a man, Barnabas, who lived at the time of Christ, who would thus have known the traditions of the time, and would have known the places and peoples, could, yet, fail on so many of these very simple items? Would God have permitted a man to write His gospel with so many glaring errors? You must decide.

(6) Why are there multiple Versions of the Bible?

The question often posed by Muslims is whether the Bible can still be called an accurate Word of God, since it has been "revised" numerous times by men. They stipulate, that since we have corrected our current "versions" they can no longer claim to be authoritative. Take the argument levelled by the popular Islamic apologist and debater Ahmed Deedat at the Revised Standard Version (RSV) Bible today.

Deedat maintains that every time Christians find a problem in the Bible they rewrite it so that it will pass scrutiny. For proof he directs his eager listeners to visit any bookstore and count the many different versions of the Bible which they can find there. He pinpoints the new RSV translation, deriding the authors who in their introduction claim the older KJV translation to be "the noblest monument of English prose," while then admitting that it has "many and serious grave defects," suggesting it had to be rewritten as the re-revised standard version in 1971.

From the outset Muslims should be careful of their contention that there are numerous versions of the Bible in existence today. There is only one Hebrew and one Greek version, though there are many manuscripts in existence, some of which do have slight differences in their scripts. The many versions which the more popular Muslim apologists, such as Ahmed Deedat and others are referring to are merely English translations of the Bible, though they continue to call them "Bible versions."

Every year there are newer translations on the market, each translated with a different intent. For instance, the RSV was written in standard English and is the traditional favourite for many traditional denominations. A newer, modern and increasingly popular English translation is the New International Version (NIV). The New American Standard Bible (NASB), another well-known translation, keeps to the exact meaning of the original text, translating into English word-for-word from the Hebrew and Greek. Consequently, it is difficult to read in English, as Greek and Hebrew grammar do not coincide with English grammar. It is, however, an excellent translation for those who want to study their Bibles seriously.

Conversely, the J.B.Phillips Translation is written in story-book fashion, while the Good News for Modern Man is written with only a 5,000 word vocabulary, to help people who speak English as a second language.

All of these translations are based on copies of the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments respectively. The manuscripts have been preserved intact by the Christian Church since a few hundred years before the time of Muhammad (two of the oldest are open to the public free of charge in the British Library, London: The Codex Syniaticus, and Codex Alexandrinus). To claim that these are somehow different editions of the Bible is naive at best, and dishonest at worst.

Interestingly the same criticism can be levelled at their Qur'an. In my library I have three different translations of the Qur'an; one by Yusuf Ali, another by Arberry, and a third by Pickthall. Other popular translations can be ordered from "Islamic Vision" in Birmingham; such as translations written by Mawdudi, Ansari, Asad, Maulana Daryabadi, Khan, and Zidan. Even a simplified version by M.S. Kayari can be bought for the non-native speaker.

Along the same lines Deedat and others show a real ignorance of our scriptures when they make gross statements such as: *"out of over four thousand differing manuscripts the Christians boast about, the church fathers just selected four which tallied with their prejudice and called them the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."* Even a novice Christian would know that these 4,000 manuscripts are not separate writings from which we could choose what we deemed to be compatible with our theology, but are near identical copies of the 27 books which constitute the New Testament.

(7) Why do some Christians include the Apocrypha, while others don't?

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In another common accusation against Christianity, Deedat makes the false charge that we Protestants have "*bravely expunged seven whole books from the Bible*," referring here to the Apocrypha. Deedat should have been advised to have done some research before condemning the Protestants. These seven books are of Jewish origin, written during the 400 year inter-testamental period (between the books of Malachi and Matthew), and were never considered by the Jews as canonical writings. They abound in historical and geographical inaccuracies, they teach doctrines which are false and are at a variance with inspired Scripture, they display an artificiality of subject matter, and they carry no prophetic power, or poetic and religious feeling.

But the overriding reason for not considering them as part of the canon is that they were never intended by their authors to be canonical, and have never been accepted as such by either the Jews, the early Christians fathers, nor the Catholic church before 1546 AD. It was only then that the Catholic Church gave them their canonical status in a polemical action at the Counter Reformation Council of Trent. It is therefore in error to say the Protestants expunged them from their canon. How can something be expunged which had never been there to begin with?

(8) Why are there Variant Readings in the Bible?

Another challenge concerns the variant readings pointed out in many of the newer translations today. Muslims believe these are grave defects which vindicate their claim that our Bible is therefore quite unreliable.

On the contrary. What these variants point out, rather, is an honest attempt by the modern Biblical translators to uphold the integrity of the English translations. The New Testament books were in high demand in the first four centuries after Christ. The printing press had not yet been invented, so the writings had to be copied out by hand and sent to the various churches to be read. In the process there were bound to be some scribal or copyist accretions.

These "defects," therefore, are nothing more than a number of variant readings which were generally unknown to the translators who compiled the original King James Version in 1611 AD. The reason for this was that they did not have the earliest manuscripts to refer to in their work.

Today many older manuscripts have been found. In fact we have available 5,300 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions, providing us with more than 24,000 manuscript copies, or portions of the New Testament from which to use! Obviously this gives us an enormous corpus of texts with which to delineate any variant verses which may exist. Where there is a variant reading, these have been identified and expunged and noted as footnotes on the relevant pages of our modern translations. In no way does this imply any defects with our Bible.

A well-known example of this can be found in 1 John 5:7-8. This verse does not exist in the older manuscripts. It was originally set out as a marginal note in an early text but was mistaken by later transcribers as part of the actual text. Therefore it no longer appears in our newer translations, though a footnote at the bottom of the page copies the verse which existed in later manuscripts, for reference sake.

Ironically, this same accusation can be levelled at the Qur'an. Suffice it to say that there is abundant evidence that when the Qur'an was first collated by the third Caliph Uthman into one standard text, in around 650 AD, there were numerous codices in existence which all contained a host of variant readings (see Bukhari 6:109-110). In some cases there were consonantal variants in certain words, in others the variants concerned whole classes, and here and there words and sentences were found in some codices that were omitted in others. We are told by the later traditions, that there were some fifteen different codices affected by these differences.

Take the example of Sura 2, where there are no less than 149 cases alone within the text of Ibn Mas'ud, the foremost authority on the Qur'an, which differed from the others in circulation, and in particular, differed with the text of Hafsah, the codex supposedly chosen and used as the final model for today's Qur'an.

According to Bukhari, the Caliph Uthman immediately called for the manuscript of the Qur'an which was in the possession of Hafsah, and ordered Zaid-ibn-Thabit and three others to 'rewrite' Hafsah's codex, correcting it wherever necessary. Once this had been done, Uthman then ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials and manuscripts be burned (Sahih al-Bukhari Vol.6:109-110).

Why all the other manuscripts had to be burned is still a mystery. There are those scholars who ask whether it contained "grave defects?" The ashes will never tell.

In comparison, at no time in Christian history has anyone attempted to standardize just one copy of the Bible as the true copy, while attempting to have all the others destroyed.

The Qur'anic text as it is read and printed throughout the Muslim world today is considered to be derived from Zaid's codex, duly corrected where necessary, and later amended by the governor al-Hajjaj. The single text as it stands today 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

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prophetic direction of divine decree.

So even the "Revised Standard Version" of the Qur'an which we now use is anything but perfect. Zaid himself admitted that Sura 33:23 was missing in his version. Furthermore, according to a number of Hadiths, the verses prescribing stoning for adultery (Rajam), which had been recited by Muhammad as part of the Qur'an during his lifetime, remains absent from the current text (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 8:817).

We can only conclude, therefore, that the evidence available completely negates the Muslims illusion that there is no proof that the Qur'an has ever been changed. A. Jeffrey's book, the Materials for the History of the text of the Qur'an contains 362 pages of incontrovertible evidence that the foremost codices during that time differed widely from one another.

Thus, the Qur'an too has suffered from variant readings. The truth is that the textual history of the Qur'an is very similar to that of the Bible. While both have been preserved remarkably well, they have each suffered from variant readings, and textual defect. Yet neither have been corrupted, so that each is, in it's basic structure and content, a fair record of what was originally there.

The only difference between the two is that whereas the variant readings which are identified in the Bible begin to appear quite late (sometime after the 4th century), pointing to an early authoritative canonical text, the variant reading in the Qur'an appear almost immediately, pointing to a manipulation and evolution to a later canonical form, sometime in the 8th century. Furthermore, the Christian Church has, in the interests of truth, carefully preserved the later variant readings that exist in the Biblical text for all to see, whereas the Muslims at the time of Uthman, or later, deemed it expedient to destroy all evidences of different readings of the Qur'an. That fact alone seems to underlines which camp, indeed, has more to answer for concerning variant readings of their scriptures.

(9) Doesn't the Bible have 50,000 Errors?

There are certain Muslims who quote the Jehovah Witnesses claim that the Bible has 50,000 errors, taking as established fact any charge they read against the Bible without the slightest effort to verify it.

Deedat makes this claim as well, and uses only 4 examples to substantiate the claim. Since many people use Deedat's material when they debate Christians it might be helpful here to go through them briefly:

1) The change by the RSV from using the word "virgin" (*bethulah*) to "young woman" (*almah*) in Isaiah 7:14 is Deedat's first example. This is not an error, but merely an issue of translation and interpretation. "Young woman" is a literal rendering of the word, though it always means an unmarried young woman. That is why some versions use the word "virgin," which helps put the meaning in it's context.

2) The change of the word in the RSV of John 3:16 from "begotten Son" to "only Son" as his second example is much the same issue. The original Greek word means "unique." Either way there is no difference between "only" and "begotten."

Interestingly, the translators of the Qur'an do much the same in their translation of Sura 19:88, where Yusuf Ali uses the word "begotten," while Pickthall, Muhammad Ali and Maulana Daryabadi use the word "taken." Is Deedat ready to say that the Qur'an too has errors on this point?

3) Deedat's third example, where the RSV corrects the 1 John 5:7 variant passage has already been dealt with earlier. Deedat naively continues that it is only this verse which supports the doctrine of the trinity. He would do well to read Matthew 28:19 and others which support this doctrine quite well.

4) Deedat's final example is rather odd, as he claims that none of the authors of the canonical Gospels recorded a single word about the ascension of Jesus. Yet, all four knew of it. John makes 11 references to it, Luke writes about it specifically in Acts 1:9, and both Matthew and Mark regularly speak of the second coming of Jesus from heaven. One wonders how Jesus could come from heaven if he had not first ascended there in the first place.

Deedat concludes with what he believes are two instances of tampering of the Biblical text: the Mark 16:9-20 and the John 8:1-11 passages. Most modern translations keep these passages in the text with an explanatory note stating that in some of the oldest manuscripts these verses do not appear.

The problem is that in other old manuscripts these passages do appear. Thus the translators are by no means tampering with the text but are merely bringing our English translations as close as possible to the original text.

These then are the only examples of the 50,000 errors which he quotes from the J.W.'s. Obviously he has an enormous task to come up with the supposed 49,996 other errors; a task I indeed wouldn't envy.

(10) Isn't the Bible full of Contradictions (or Numerical Errors)?

Muslims enjoy pointing out a number of numerical discrepancies in the Old Testament which they

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believe weaken the authority for the Bible since God would not allow such glaring contradictions within His Word. Some put the number as high as 50,000, yet no-one has entertained the notion to point out where such a vast number of errors exist, since to do so would involve nearly every verse in the Bible!

Over the past century a list of popular Biblical contradictions have been tabulated by scores of critics, almost all of which have been answered in a number of well known publications, such as: Gleason Archer's Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (1994), John Haley's Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, Josh McDowell's Christianity: A Ready Defence, (1990), or the two volumes published by 'Light of Life' The True Guidance, Part Two, ('False Charges against the Old Testament'), (1992), and The True Guidance, Part Three, ('False Charges against the New Testament'), (1992). A further 101 supposed contradictions tabulated by the Muslim apologist, Shabir Ally, have been answered by those of us here working here in London in a paper entitled '101 Cleared up Contradictions', which is available on the internet at: <<http://debate.org.uk/topics/apolog/contrads.htm>>

Upon closer scrutiny, much of what Muslims claim to be errors are nothing more than copyist mistakes. Let me explain. It is quite clear that the books of the Old Testament were written in the fifth century BC on the only writing material available at that time, pieces of Papyrus, which decayed rather quickly, and so needed continual copying. We know that much of the Old Testament was copied by hand for over 2,300 years, while the New Testament was copied for between 100-300 years, in isolated communities situated in different lands and on different continents, yet they still remain basically unchanged.

Today many archaic manuscripts have been found which we can use to corroborate the earlier manuscripts. In fact we have an enormous collection of manuscripts available. Concerning the New Testament manuscripts (MSS) we have 5,300 Greek MSS, 10,000 Latin Vulgate MSS and at least 9,300 other early versions. In all we now have more than 24,000 manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament from which to use, around 350 of which date from before the sixth century alone! Obviously this gives us much more material with which to delineate any variant verses which may exist. Where there is a variant reading, these have been identified and expunged and noted as footnotes on the relevant pages of our current texts. In no way does this imply any defects with our Bible.

Christians readily admit that there have been copyist errors or accretions in the copies of the Old and New Testament. It is beyond the capability of anyone to avoid any and every slip of the pen in copying page after page from any book, sacred or secular. Yet we may be sure that the original manuscript of each book of the Bible, being directly inspired by God, was free from all error. Those originals, however, no longer exist.

The individuals who did the copying (copyists) were prone to making two types of scribal errors. One concerned the spelling of proper names (especially unfamiliar proper names), and the other had to do with numbers. The fact that it is mostly these types of error in evidence gives credence to the argument for copyist accretions. If indeed the originals were in contradiction, we would see evidence of this within the content of the stories themselves. (Archer 1982:221-222)

What is important to remember, however, is that no well-attested variation in the manuscript copies that have come down to us alter any single doctrine of the Bible. To this extent, at least, the Holy Spirit has exercised a restraining influence in superintending the transmission of the text. Let's take a look at three examples to better understand what we are saying.

II Kings 24:8 vs. II Chronicles 36:9 (King Jehoiachin's age: 18 or 8)

II Samuel 10:18 vs. I Chronicles 19:18 (men of 700 chariots or 7,000 men)

II Chronicles 9:25 vs. I Kings 4:26 (4,000 stalls or 40,000 stalls)

There are many more examples which we could use, but these three are well representative of the problem which exists. The errors in these examples all have to do with the decade in the number given.

Take the first example concerning the king Jehoiachin, whose age at accession is given in II Kings as 18, and later in II Chronicles as 8. There is enough information in the context of these two passages to tell us that 8 is wrong and 18 right. The age of 8 is unusually young to assume governmental leadership.

As we mentioned, in each case it is the decade number that varies. It is instructive to observe that the number notations used by the Jewish settlers in the 5th century BC, Elephantine Papyri, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (fortunately we have a large file of documents in papyrus from this source), consisted of a horizontal stroke ending in a downward hook at its right end to represent the numbers in tens (thus two horizontal strokes one above the other would be 20). Vertical strokes were used to represent anything less than ten. Thus eight would be /III IIII, but eighteen would be /III IIII with the addition of a horizontal line and downward hook above it. Similarly twenty-two would be /I followed by two horizontal hooks, and forty-two would be /I followed by two sets of horizontal hooks (please forgive the deficiencies of my computer; it is not the scholar Dr. Archer is).

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If, then, the primary manuscript from which a copy was being carried out was blurred or smudged, one or more of the decadel notations could be missed by the copyist. It is far less likely that the copyist would have mistakenly seen an extra ten stroke that was not present in his original than that he would have failed to observe one that had been smudged.

In the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, the corrections have been included in the texts. However, for clarity, footnotes at the bottom of the page mention that earlier Hebrew MSS include the scribal error, while the Septuagint MSS and Syriac as well as one Hebrew MSS include the correct numerals. It only makes sense to correct the numerals once the scribal error has been noted. This, however, in no way negates the authenticity nor the authority of the scriptures which we have (Archer 1982:206-207, 214-215; Nehls pg.17-18).

(11) How could certain authors in the Bible write about themselves in the third person?

A common accusation by Muslims at 'Speaker's Corner', in London is the contention that certain writers of the Bible could not have written the books which have been ascribed to them. Moses could not have written the five books of Moses because they contained statements such as "The Lord said unto Moses..." Furthermore, they contend that since one can find the obituary of Moses in the 34th chapter of Deuteronomy it must have been written by someone else.

Matthew, they believe, could not have written Matthew because Matthew describes himself in the third person.

Why an author cannot describe himself in the third person is not only simplistic but ludicrous, especially in light of the fact that Allah does the same for himself in the Qur'an, Sura 5:110, where we find written, "*When Allah saith, O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto thee.*" I see no difference between a saying where the Lord spoke to Moses (the claimed author of the Pentateuch) in the Bible, and where Allah (the claimed author of the Qur'an) spoke to Jesus in the Qur'an. Allah is alleged to be the author of the Qur'an by Muslims, yet he is described in it on numerous occasions in the third person.

As for the obituary of Moses. It should be quite obvious to anyone reading chapter 34 of Deuteronomy that this was written by Moses's successor Joshua, who also wrote the book which immediately follows it. It has only been added to Deuteronomy as a conclusion to the amazing story of Moses which we find in Deuteronomy and the other four books of Moses.

(12) By knowing the source of a book do we not invalidate its authority?

Another similar point of contention for Muslims follows that Matthew was not the real author of the book of Matthew since he cribbed his book by copying his material from Mark. Matthew, as any good Bible scholar will tell you, did better than that; his and Mark's real source was Peter, a person who had far more first-hand information about the life of Jesus than Matthew or Mark, since Peter was with Jesus more often than the other disciples.

This argument could have held water had the source been extra-Biblical, from outside the Gospels, but it isn't, and Matthew could hardly have found a more reliable source for his Gospel than that of Peter.

Ironically, it is this very accusation against the sources for the Qur'an which has proved so damaging to the authority for the Qur'an. We don't have the time or space to cover this very real problem here.

Suffice it to say, however, that entire passages and stories in the Qur'an which are set forth as historically true, have almost identical parallels with pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian books of fables and fairy-tales.

For instance: the murder of Abel by Cain, and the Raven sent by Allah to show him how to hide his brother's naked corpse, as well as an almost redemptive analysis of this act in Sura 5:27-32, parallels a similar account written by Pirke Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 21), a 2nd century Jewish document, the Targum of Jonathan-ben-Uzziah, and the Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5. The story of Abraham destroying the idols and being thrown into a fire, only to be rescued by Allah in Sura 21:51-71 follows the Midrash Rabah, which incorporates the musings on the word 'UR' to signify fire by the scribe Jonathan Ben Uziel. The delightful story of Solomon, the Hoopoo bird and the Queen of Sheba found in Sura 27:17-44, is almost word for word identical to the 2nd century apocryphal writing entitled the II Targum of Esther.

For those who are interested in pursuing this further, both Gerhard Nehl's Christians ask Muslims and St. Clair Tisdall's, The Sources of Islam (1904), go into this area in great detail. What we must say here is that instead of trying to make capital out of the passages in the Bible which have parallels elsewhere in the Bible, Muslims should rather give us an alternative explanation as to why Qur'anic passages are embarrassingly similar to and patently reliant on Jewish and Christian books of fables and folklore written in an around the 2nd - 4th centuries AD?

(13) How can a book which includes Pornography be accepted as God's Word?

A growing number of Muslims take the position that the Bible can not be the Word of God because it contains stories which are pornographic; stories such as Judah's incest with Tamar (Genesis 38) or Lot's incest with his daughters. Deedat used this argument to good effect in his public debate with Annis Shorrosh in Birmingham in 1988.

What this argument fails to comprehend is the intent of the Word of God. These sins which are referred to are not sins of God but those of men, even the best of men. Nowhere in these stories is the character of God brought into reproach. Instead these episodes unreservedly expose the sins of humanity for what they are and refuse to cover up the excesses of even the best of them. The Bible is concerned about the praise of God, and not the praise of men. It is the glory of God that the Bible speaks about-not the vainglory of men, and for this reason it can claim to be God's Word.

Often, when Muslims forward this accusation, they fail to mention the story of David's sin with Bathsheba (in 2 Samuel 11), a sin which is a far greater wickedness than the others usually offered, as David not only lusts after Bathsheba, and then commits adultery with her, but then has Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, killed so that he can take her for his wife.

Why is this story conveniently omitted? Possibly because the Qur'an refers to it as well, in Sura 38:25-26, where David bows down to ask forgiveness for this very sin, though the sin itself is not spelled out. The fact that the Qur'an upholds this supposedly pornographic Biblical story shows that there can be no genuine objection to similar stories where the misdemeanours of other prophets are set out in the Bible.

What Muslims have not realized is that their argument points to a chasm of understanding between Christianity and Islam, a theological belief that is the very core of the Gospel message. By revealing these deficiencies of humanity, the Bible teaches us that all people are sinful, even the best of men, and that their sins incur damning consequences, which therefore needs forgiveness. If the Bible omitted the sinfulness of God's own prophets, it would then suggest that there was a two-tiered righteousness which existed in humanity, that somehow the prophets were on a different level than the rest of us, that they didn't deal with the same problems as those to whom they were sent to help.

This is wrong, and exposes an inherent weakness in Islamic theology, that is, its total inability to even acknowledge, let alone answer the very real problem of universal sin in all of humanity, prophet and laymen alike.

(14) How can a book which includes bad actions of men be accepted as God's Word?

Along the same lines, Muslims contend that the Word of God must not contain any bad language. The Old Testament from which Muslims obtain their examples constitutes the written history of the Jews. It is well known that historians of any country endeavour to record history in such a way that their country and its people are glorified. As a result, historical records of identical events may contain vast variations from country to country according to their bias. In the frank recording of the shameful sins of Israel in the Old Testament we see an obvious sign that nobody tried to "improve" the image of the Jews. This weighs heavily in favour of the integrity and truthfulness of the Biblical record. We see in the recording of these atrocities a sign of the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Therefore, to say, as Muslims have done, that the Bible treats the Jews with disrespect because it uses strong language, misses the point. The harsh language is reserved for those who are in sin, whoever they may be. The language for the sin of the Jews is perhaps strong because the Bible takes sin to be a very serious offence against God (refer to Mark 7:20-23 and Galatians 5:19 for a list of sins).

The Bible does not condone the act of sin, nor does it offer any praise for dirty actions, but proclaims rather the impending judgement of God (see II Samuel 11:26; 27-12:1-19). Throughout the Bible God is shown to be absolutely holy, perfectly righteous, and wonderfully loving. If it unreservedly exposes the sins of men for what they are and refuses to cover up the excesses of even the best of them, there is surely a very fair claim that it is God's Word, for it is concerned about the praise of God and not the praise of men.

Essentially, sin in the Bible is all that which is not like God, all that which is not holy and therefore, that which is unclean. We all stand accused. Not just the Jews, but every human being. Thus we are not surprised when the Bible addresses us as rebellious people (Deuteronomy 9:7), or adulterous (referring to the fact that we have other gods in our life, money, pleasures, jobs, instead of putting God first).

Muslims contend that as a contrast the Qur'an is courteous and respectful to the Jews. Yet, the Qur'an condemns the Jews as well. It may be helpful to refer to **Sura 5:57**, which reads, "*O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers.*" That is followed by **Sura 5:85**, which reads, "*Thou wilt surely find*

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the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters" (Arberry's translation).

(15) How can a book which includes bad language be accepted as God's Word?

A popular objection by Muslims is the disturbing and disrespectful language which the Bible contains. There are two ways we can tackle this problem.

First of all, Christians accept that the Bible, indeed, uses human language to communicate God's revelation to humanity. We do not hold to the Qur'anic principle of 'tanzil' (sent down, unfettered by human intermediaries) for our scriptures. Therefore, the Bible certainly exemplifies a variety of styles in writing, as it was written by a variety of individuals. At times it records the words of the people spoken in a particular situation. An example is the quote in 2 Kings 18:27 or Isaiah 36:12, of the former Assyrian (Iraqi) general speaking crudely to the children of Israel.

The words were either written in Hebrew or Aramaic in the original writings. The words Muslims are offended by are merely English translations of these words. We must remember that there is rarely a one-to-one word equivalent when translating from one language to another. The translator is forced to choose the nearest word in keeping with the context of the passage. Conversely, there may be two or three words in the translators language for the one found in Hebrew.

Take for instance the example of the Hebrew word *mamzer* in Zechariah 9:6. This can be translated as a child of unlawful union, or one who is illegitimate, or a child of mixed parentage (a child from a believing or Israelite parent married to an unbeliever or non-Israelite). It can also be translated as a mongrel, or a bastard (the word taken from French which came into English usage in the 16th century). A translator has the right to choose one word or the other, depending on which he considers to be the most applicable. The NIV uses the word "foreigner," the Revised Standard Version, and the NASB use the word "Mongrel." "Bastard" is a perfectly legitimate usage for the context, however.

Interestingly, the word "Bastard" was not considered a curse word until quite recently, and would not have raised eyebrows at that time, as it does today. Since languages evolve, translations, therefore, must evolve with them. This may be the reason the NIV and NASB have chosen "foreigner," and "mongrel."

As I looked up the references which Muslims found offensive, I came across just this sort of evolution. In the more current NIV translation I found that instead of the word "bastard," they used "person of forbidden marriage" (Deut.23:2), and "illegitimate" (Hebrews 12:8). For "shit," they chose "own filth" (2 Kings 18:27), and instead of "piss," they chose "urine" (Isaiah 36:12). I do not find these choices offensive, and I trust they meet with the Muslims approval as well.

A second answer to this problem concerning the use of bad language points to a real chasm of understanding between Christianity and Islam, a theological belief that is the very core of our Gospel message: that we are all sinners and in need of redeeming that sin.

This exposes an inherent weakness in Islamic theology, that is, its total inability to even acknowledge, let alone answer the very real problem of universal sin in all of humanity.

(16) How could the ancestry of Jesus, one of the greatest prophets, include sinners?

An often voiced criticism by Muslims, is the abhorrence that one of the greatest prophets respected by both Christians and Jews would have sinful ancestors. They point to the ancestry of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew to make their case. Muslim apologists deride this account as it contains "adulterers and offspring of incest," since it refers to four women who had moral or ethnic defects:

Tamar committed incest with Judah

Rahab was a prostitute and a gentile

Ruth was also a gentile, not of the chosen race of Abraham

Bathsheba was an adulteress

Matthew included these four, and not others such as Sarah and Rebecca (though they also were Jesus's ancestors), because it was precisely for people such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba that Jesus came into the world to save.

For many Muslims these stories represent a cancer which must not infect and pervert the Word of God, much as they believe dirty words will do. For Christians these women take on a much wider appeal, because they represent every one of us. The fact that God has chosen the gentile, the prostitute, and the adulterer, those who are in sin, to be a part of the line of His final revelation to humanity, Jesus Christ, speaks volumes, as it gives all of us hope to also belong to that line.

This fact not only reveals the universality of sin in the world, it, as well, reveals the universality of God's salvific work. We, in our sinfulness can and do claim the blood of Christ, which allows even the greatest

sinner an immediate assurance of salvation; a claim no Muslim dare make. I can, therefore, understand why they feel threatened not only by the tone of our scriptures, but by the enormous depth of its message, a message which no other book or prophet has ever attempted to preach. It is for that reason these accusations have been levelled and will continue to be levelled. We need have no fear, however, for the message of the Bible itself is its own best defence. For where sins abound, and are revealed for what they are, there the truth of God's revealed Word will set it free.

CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY:

What, then, can we say concerning these misconceptions of our Bible? From what we know there is no doubt that our Bible has been transmitted to us accurately so that what we have is the exact representation of what God said and did. Not only will the Jews corroborate the proof for its accuracy, but documents such as the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls give added weight to the claim that it has never been changed.

Even the Qur'an, written during the 7th-9th centuries recognized the authority of our scriptures. We also know that, outside of a few scribal errors, the historical events and personages are adequately correct, as they do not confuse names, dates and events, and in fact, surprisingly, continue to coincide with current archaeological findings. While Muslim scholars continue to borrow fraudulent data from secular sources to attack the validity of the Bible (material from the Jesus Seminar), or even fabricate documents of their own (The Gospel of Barnabas), once these documents are scrutinized they lay bare the false premise from which they are foisted, and do little to dent the formidable authenticity which the Bible can and does claim for itself. For these reasons we can rest assured in the authority for our scriptures, with the hope that Muslims, in time, will also see the error in their perceptions and look again at that which they have so easily discarded.

Furthermore, a document, to be considered to have come from an all-knowing God, must meet certain criteria: **First**, it must have been transmitted to us accurately so that what we have is the exact representation of what God said and did. **Secondly** historical events and personages must be correct. A book from God cannot confuse names, dates and events. **Thirdly**, any book from God should not contain any scientific absurdities (outside of miracles) which would give away its human authorship.

The Bible does this and much more. There is more evidence for the reliability of the text of the New Testament than there is for any ten pieces of classical literature put together. It is also in better textual shape than the 37 plays of William Shakespeare which were written just 300 years ago, after the invention of printing.

"With the abundance of existing manuscripts (handwritten copies) of the New Testament (more than 24,000, with 230 compiled before the 7th century), we know nothing has been lost through the transmission of the text." As far as we can know, the names, places, and events mentioned in the Bible have been recorded accurately. With each successive year, ongoing archaeological discoveries fail to divulge any contradictions. Instead they continue to corroborate what the Bible has been saying for 2,000 years (examples such as the *Ebla* tablets, or the newly discovered tomb of the priest *Caiaphus* give continuing credibility to the scriptures trustworthiness).

The testimony of the historical evidence is that the Bible can be trusted as an accurate document. When the Bible speaks on scientific matters it does so with correct and simple terms, devoid of absurdities; though one would not expect such from a book written by men during pre-scientific times. Instead of the usual flights of imagination found in other documents of that era, the Bible shows restraint, such as the quite scientifically accurate account of creation, or the specific dimensions given for the ark, making it seaworthy for a ship of its size and requirements.

We must also know that the Bible is unique? Consider: Here is a book written over a 1,500 year span (about 40 generations), by more than 40 authors, among whose number were found: kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, a herdsman, a general, a cupbearer, a doctor, a tax collector, and a rabbi. It was written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe, and in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial topics, yet from Genesis right on through to Revelation the authors all spoke with harmony and continuity on the theme of the unfolding story of "God's redemption of humanity."

While the seeming contradictions and revisions exemplified turn out to be nothing more than numerical copying accretions within the manuscripts, we can clearly state that from what we know there is no doubt that our Bible has been transmitted to us accurately so that what we have is the exact representation of what God said and did. Not only will the Jews corroborate the proof for its accuracy, but documents such as the "Septuagint" and the "Dead Sea Scrolls" give added weight to the claim that it has never been changed.

Christian Apologetics to Islam

Even the Qur'an, written during the seventh to ninth centuries recognized the authority of our scriptures. We also know that, outside of the few scribal errors, the historical events and personages are adequately correct, as they do not confuse names, dates and events, and in fact, surprisingly, continue to coincide with current archaeological findings.

The accusations against revising our scriptures turn out to be nothing more than a misunderstanding by Muslims of an honest attempt by Christians to correct current translations so that they correspond to older and, thus more authoritative manuscripts which we now have in our possession.

If God truly created the world for His pleasure, He would have created it to work to a pattern. This pattern we would expect to find revealed in His Word; as indeed we do, not only in the life of Jesus, the Word, who came and dwelt amongst us, but in the truth of the Gospel which was found in His teaching and later written down by His apostles.

And finally, our Bible not only stands 'heads and shoulders' above any books of antiquities in its depth of understanding and wisdom, while at the same time containing no scientific absurdities which would give away its human authorship, it refuses to whitewash away the sins of even its closest adherents, admitting the universality of sin in the world while revealing, likewise, the universality of Jesus's salvific work. Only the Bible offers even the greatest sinner an immediate and eternal assurance of salvation.

It should not surprise us that the Bible continues to be the source of God's revelation to His creation, for families and communities around the world, and that, according to the latest statistics, the Bible is uncontested as the most popular book ever written, and is read by more people and published in more languages than any other book in history, so that today "one copy is published every three seconds day and night; or 22 copies every minute day and night; or 1,369 copies every hour day and night; and 32,876 copies every day in the year, and so on..."

It is logical, then, that Christianity, because it holds the repository of Biblical principles and thinking, is the fastest conversion-growing religion in the world today. What better testimony could one ask to demonstrate the Bible's claim to be the truly revealed and inspired Word of God.

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