

# FACING THE MUSLIM CHALLENGE

A HANDBOOK OF  
CHRISTIAN — MUSLIM  
APOLOGETICS

by

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Dedicated to the members of the  
**Eastvale Baptist Church**

in Springs, South Africa, who have  
faithfully contributed to Muslim  
evangelism in South Africa for  
the past fifteen years

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# Introduction

## The Christian-Muslim Cutting-Edge

Great conflicts come and go but one, which has endured for nearly fourteen centuries, appears destined to remain until the end. It is the classic battle - a universal one which outlives every generation. It is the struggle between Islam and Christianity for the souls of all who live on earth. Although mostly unrecognised, it is probably the supreme contest - one which tackles the greatest of issues, namely the very purpose of human existence and its ultimate destiny. Each has its own figurehead who is claimed to be God's final messenger to all mankind - Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world or Muhammad the universal Prophet to the nations. Each has its own mission - the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth or the establishment of an *ummah* (community) which covers the globe. Each, likewise, has its own conviction of its ultimate triumph over all the philosophies, religions and powers that have challenged human allegiance. It is only natural that they should come into conflict.

This book tackles the cutting-edge between Islam and Christianity, in particular the arguments Muslims employ in discussion or debate with Christians to establish the pre-eminence of Islam by rigorously refuting the authenticity of the Christian scriptures and its fundamental doctrines. Any Christian who engages Muslims in conversation will soon find that they are equipped with an armoury of objections which they will interject into the conversation to undermine the Gospel message and distract the Christian by placing him firmly on the defensive.

## Islam's Onslaught against Christianity

The challenge goes back to the time of Muhammad himself. The Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, has numerous polemical passages confronting Christian beliefs, not only opposing them but proposing rational arguments to disprove them. In the early centuries of Islam Muslim scholars wrote numerous disputations challenging the integrity of the Bible (Ibn Hazm), the doctrine of the Trinity (Abu Isa al-Warraq), the social structure of Christian Society (Al-Jahiz) while also arguing forcefully that Muhammad is foretold in both the Old and New Testaments (Ali Tabari). Modern times have seen polemical material mass-produced for distribution throughout the world, in particular the booklets of Ahmed Deedat, a Muslim propagandist from my own country, South Africa.

Christians have been equally confrontational at times, powerfully calling the credentials of Muhammad’s prophethood into question and producing numerous evidences against the assertion that the Qur’an is the Word of God. In both cases the thrust has often been strongly partial and imbalanced. The finest ideals of the adherent’s faith are often set in contrast to the worst excesses of the other’s in practice without the debater apparently being aware of the unfairness of his method. For example, the Christian may argue forcefully that women are treated very poorly in parts of the Muslim world in contrast with the Biblical teaching that they are entitled to enjoy equality in a monogamous marriage (*Ephesians 5.28-33*) without taking the prevalence of divorce and immorality in traditional Christian societies in the Western world into account. Likewise a Muslim will teach that Islam is the religion of perfect peace while ignoring the numerous conflicts in the Muslim world and the bombings of embassies, aircraft, trade centres and the like in the name of Islam. Muslims will also claim that the universal unity of the Muslim world compares favourably with the numerous divisions in Christian churches while ignoring the vast numbers of conflicting sects in Islam and the fact that Islamic unity is really a *uniformity* of worship only based on the strictly prescribed nature of Muslim prayers, fasting, ablutions and the *Hajj* pilgrimage.

In this book my aim is to deal mainly with Muslim arguments against Christianity, providing Christians with effective answers to their contentions. I have had the privilege of engaging in discussion with thousands of Muslims in South Africa over twenty-five years and must have heard just about every objection that they could possibly raise to the Christian faith and its scriptures. I have also perused all the Muslim booklets listed in the Bibliography at the end of this book. I can, with genuine conviction, say that *I have never heard a Muslim argument that cannot be legitimately and adequately answered*. The arguments listed in the following chapters are those most commonly put forward by Muslims in personal conversation and are presented in an objection/answer form to give Christians firsthand examples of how to counter them.

### Muslim Attitudes which Frustrate Christians

What I have often discovered in lively debate with Muslims is certain attitudes on their part that are calculated to hinder profitable discussion. At best Christians and Muslims should argue their positions with a common goal to discover God’s ultimate truths. What often happens, however, is that Muslims seek only to frustrate Christian witness, putting forward their arguments as a smokescreen rather than as a platform for healthy interaction. Objections are regularly stated without any opportunity being given for a Christian reply. For example, I have often heard questions such as “How can God have a Son when

he has no wife?”, “If Christ died for your sins, does this mean you can sin as much as you like?”, etc., as if the objection itself proved the point and was the last word on the subject. The Muslim often does not want to hear a reply, let alone an effective refutation!

Very few Muslims have a real understanding of Christianity as is abundantly evidenced in the booklets they produce against it. Christians are accused of believing in three gods, the New Testament is presumed to be a changed version of the Old Testament which is assumed to be the original scripture, while the deity of Jesus Christ is discounted on physical grounds, it being alleged that God cannot have a Son without a wife even though the Qur’an itself, in *Surah 19.20-21*, teaches that by God’s power and decree Mary could have a son even though she had no husband!

Christians need to show much patience when reasoning with Muslims in such cases. Another source of frustration is the inclination on the part of many Muslims to freely assail the authenticity of the Bible or basic Christian beliefs while at the same time becoming highly offended when the tables are turned on the Qur’an and Islam. Yet again Christians need to be tolerant and remain focused in such cases, not resorting to a similar approach in return. Other Muslims will argue purely to find fault with no desire to hear reasonable answers. I have often had encounters where Muslims have boldly proclaimed an objection against a tenet of our faith which I have taken time to effectively answer. Often the answer cannot be given as briefly or emphatically as the argument is proclaimed. Nevertheless, even though the Muslim has made no effort to counter the explanation, he will at a later date triumphantly repeat the same argument as if no refutation had ever been given. Patience and perseverance are necessary in such cases! Prejudices are not easily removed.

### Muslim Arguments Need to be Answered

Some might say, “Why argue at all?” - why not just exchange our different beliefs in a spirit of mutual understanding and leave the issues between our faiths alone? There are a number of reasons why Christians, if they are to be true to their faith and themselves, must be willing to answer Muslim objections and counter their arguments.

Firstly, if you cannot defend your faith, the Muslim will conclude that you may be fervent in your beliefs but cannot justify them. Your unwillingness to tackle the cutting-edges will persuade the Muslim that your religion is actually indefensible. Secondly, when you can not only state *what* you believe but can also effectively say *why*, the Muslim will be more inclined to listen to you, knowing you have personally tested the credibility of your beliefs and can convincingly defend them. Thirdly, when Muslims do become Christian

believers, they invariably want to know right away what the evidences are for the faith they now profess, especially as they may well be challenged by Muslims to revert to Islam and will need to be well-trained to resist such pressures. The Apostle Peter stated very plainly that Christians must be ready to face the challenges put to them and also finely stated the spirit in which they should respond:

Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.  
*1 Peter 3.15-16.*

The Apostle Paul never shirked the duty to substantiate what he believed with adequate proofs. While in the company of contentious Jews who thrived on controversy, he would “argue with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (*Acts 17.2*). He was not interested in a mere exchange of religious views, hoping his Gospel message would prove attractive enough merely by its presentation. He knew he had to be able to accredit everything he said if his detractors were to take him seriously. On another occasion he said “We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God” (*2 Corinthians 10.5*), proving himself to be a man who had mastered his subject and fully confident in his ability to endorse the truth of what he believed.

In Muslim evangelism it is essential that the Christian be able to counter the objections and arguments Muslims readily produce. In the next section we shall consider the spirit in which the Christian should respond.

## The Christian Response: Right Methods and Approaches

The chapters of this book give examples of effective ways of answering the commonest Muslim arguments against the Bible and its teaching. It is essential that the content of these examples be sound and convincing. Nonetheless this book would be seriously incomplete if some attention was not given to the manner in which the Christian should conduct himself while in discussion with Muslims. The spirit of our approach is as important in making a genuine impact on Muslims as the substance of our arguments.

## Examples of Wrong Approaches and Attitudes

There are many ways in which Christians damage their witness to Muslims of which three will be considered here.

### 1. The Spirit of Triumphalism

Many years ago I attended a public meeting in Durban, South Africa, where up to two thousand Christians and Muslims were waiting for the local City Hall to open its doors. Entrance had been delayed and the crowd simply stood outside in silence. Dr Anis Shorosh, a Palestinian Christian, had advertised the meeting as a rebuff to Ahmed Deedat, the local Muslim champion of anti-Christian polemics, having challenged him publicly to have the courage to share the platform with him. The atmosphere outside the hall, understandably, was tense. Suddenly one of the local Christian pastors shouted to one of his friends, “let’s sing a few songs to the Lord”. They began by boldly singing the chorus *Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered* which was soon followed up triumphantly with *In the name of Jesus we have the victory, in the name of Jesus demons will have to flee*.

Unfortunately the “demons” did not flee - they fought back. And they won! A Muslim soon interrupted the singing with a bold chant of *Allahu Akbar!* In no time one thousand Muslims roared to the incessant chant of *Allahu Akbar!* (Allah is Most Great) which was soon followed up with *La ilaha illullah!* (There is no God but Allah) in great unison and purpose until the Christian chorus-singing was thoroughly drowned out and silenced. A Christian bystander nervously asked me “What are they singing?” (this was still in the heyday of Islamic revolutionism and frenzied fundamentalism) to which I replied “Calm down, they are merely chanting that God alone is Great”.

It is easy to boldly sing such choruses in the comfort of Christian fellowships when no one else is listening. Triumphalism is a common feature of many contemporary forms of Christian worship. It has no place, however, in the frontline of Christian-Muslim interaction. We are called to be a humble people speaking in a spirit of love to all we meet. It has well been said that our aim is to win Muslims to Christ, not to win a battle for Christianity.

Christians must avoid the temptation to try to lord their faith over Muslims. Likewise we need to resist the inclination to try to prove points simply to win a debate. The *hearer* himself is our major point of concern. All we say and the spirit in which we do it must be geared to win the confidence, hearing and goodwill of our opposite number. Our approach should be that which is enjoined in this passage:

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one. *Colossians 4.6*

In various seminars I have repeatedly urged Christians to memorise the following proverb - if necessary to write it out one thousand times until it sinks in:

***I-S-L-A-M* stands for *I Shall Love All Muslims!***

I have heard it said that Christians must *hate* Islam but *love* the Muslim. May I suggest it would be more appropriate to love all Muslims and to strive to *understand* Islam. The more you learn about the Muslim faith, the more you will learn to respect it (I speak from personal experience) *and* the more Muslims will respect you and be willing to listen to you. When Christians show that they have gone to much trouble to find out sincerely what Muslims believe and to become acquainted with the Qur'an and the Islamic heritage, Muslims invariably respond by becoming more inclined to enter into serious discussion rather than sheer debate and argument. We need to earn the right to be heard.

**2. The Inclination to Demonise and Misrepresent Islam**

Many Christian writers and public speakers have assailed Islam by ignoring its actual history and basic teachings while projecting false assumptions instead which are much easier to vilify and condemn. Some years ago in my own country, South Africa, a public campaign was launched by certain Christian leaders against the Muslim *halaal* symbol which appears on the wrappings of margarine, poultry and other products in local supermarkets. It was claimed that this was a sign which indicated that the product had been offered as a sacrifice to the Muslim idol, Allah, and that Christians should not eat such products as Paul forbade the eating of foods sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 10.19-22.

Other recent Christian publications have claimed that Allah was the "moon-god" of the pagan Arabs prior to Islam and that the god of the Muslims is, in effect, really only a cult-god. Once you classify Allah in Islam as a false god or idol it becomes that much easier to attack Muslim beliefs. In discussion with Muslims such falsehoods must be avoided. Allah is the universal Arabic name for the only Supreme Being of the whole universe and is freely used by Arabic speaking Christians and Jews as well as Muslims. Likewise the *halaal* symbol is purely an indication that the product is "loosed" from any restrictions and may freely be eaten. In a way it means the exact opposite of what some Christians have alleged (the contrary word *haraam* is used in Islam to describe foods set apart for non-consumption such as swine-flesh) and certainly never indicates that the food has been offered in any kind of sacrifice.

Another popular Christian fallacy being widely promoted (and unfortunately believed) these days is that Islam was originally a Catholic conspiracy to eliminate Jews and Christians who refused to bow to the Vatican's authority. Muhammad was supposedly deceived by an ingenious plot whereby his wife Khatija, said to be a Catholic spy, motivated him to become a great leader to execute the Vatican's designs and purposes. Unfortunately, as Islam became strong with Vatican financial support, it rebelled and took its own way through history. This story is not only fanciful in the extreme, defying all the extensive historical records of Muhammad's life and Islam's beginnings, but has been promoted by one Dr Alberto Rivera purely on hearsay from a Jesuit cardinal known as Augustine Bea in secret briefings said to have taken place within the Vatican. Even though it is based on pure falsehood, large numbers of Christians (who often know little else about Islam) fervently believe it and bring it up in discussion with Muslims.

In promoting error you can only drive Muslims further from the truth. Christians need to strive at all times to be truthful in their witness and objective in their perspectives. Be true to the Word of God, to the credible records of history, and avoid trying to gain an advantage over Islam by pursuing false charges against it.

**3. Negative and Militant Attitudes towards Muslims**

About a thousand years ago the world saw the beginning of a new Christian approach to Islam which was to dominate the Middle East for three centuries. The **Crusades**, up to fourteen in all, were launched from Western Europe against the Muslim world in an attempt to wrest much of it for Catholic Christianity, in particular the holy sites in Jerusalem, so that Christian pilgrimages could freely take place and so that a dominant Christian presence and power might be maintained in the region. Many paintings survive of battles between Christians and Muslims, the Christian soldiers invariably holding a sword in one hand and a shield with a painted cross on it in the other.

The Christians were undoubtedly the aggressors and the Muslim world endured a series of wars, conflicts and campaigns that can only be described as an exercise in Christian *jihad*. The First Crusade, promoted by Pope Urban II, was surprisingly successful for, even though the Christian armies were small, they caught the Muslims unawares and, under leaders such as Godfrey de Bouillon, conquered many cities including Jerusalem, ruthlessly putting Jews and Muslims to the sword until their blood flowed in the streets. Later crusades were neither as successful nor as brutal as the initial ventures but they left a legacy of Christian-Muslim hostility that endures to this day.

Modern Christian militancy against Islam takes a less violent form but is still prevalent. “We are at war with Islam” is a rallying call I have personally heard Christians declare and it leads to a negativity towards Muslims which they can easily sense. As our Saviour is described as the “Prince of Peace” (*Isaiah 9.6*) such an approach hardly seems appropriate. Should our mission not rather be seen as a peace campaign? Instead of harping on embassy bombings, international hijackings, incidents such as the downing of an American airline over Lockerbie in Scotland and the like which cultivate a negative sentiment towards Muslims, we should surely rather develop an attitude of goodwill and love towards them. Likewise we should be willing to give ourselves sacrificially in witness and service just as Jesus Christ did for us when he did not count our faults against us but willingly gave his own life to bring us back to God. Only when we are willing to love Muslims irrespective of who they are or what they might have done will we be truly able to manifest the love of Jesus towards them and fulfil the fundamental purpose of our witness - to draw them to his grace and salvation.

## Important Principles in our Approach to Muslims

At a more practical level let us have a look at certain principles of witness we should endeavour to express while either witnessing to Muslims or engaging in argument with them.

### 1. Fairness, Patience and Gentleness

You no doubt are familiar with the saying “Keep your head even while all around are losing theirs”. Muslims often, in argument with Christians, deliberately harass and challenge with the main purpose of rattling the Christian until he loses his temper or becomes angry and offended. This to them is a sign that they have won the day and that the Christian’s response is a proof that he cannot answer their objections. It is essential to maintain composure all the time and, even if you find Muslims frustrating and annoying, to keep up a spirit of quiet goodwill and reasoned conversation.

Likewise do not be surprised or deflated when they attack the very core of your message. Muslims are trained in anti-Christian arguments. Picture the fervent evangelist knocking on a Muslim door for the first time. When the Muslim opens he declares “I have come to tell you the glorious news of God’s Son Jesus Christ who died for you that you might be forgiven and go to heaven”. He might well expect the hearer to respond “Why, this is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard in my life. Where can I be baptised?” If so, he is likely to be sorely disappointed. He is far more likely to be confronted with

this sort of response: “God has no partners! Where did he get a Son from? Who was God’s wife? How could he let his Son die anyway? Have you got sons? Would you just stand by watching while criminals murdered them? You want us to believe God did nothing to save his own Son? What sort of a Father is that? Anyway, no one can die for your sins - every soul bears the burden of its own guilt. If Christ died for you, does this not give you the right now to sin as you like seeing you are already forgiven?”

Muslims readily reduce Christian witness to a level of debate, conflict and argument. This cannot be avoided. Christians at such times will need to reason fairly with them, endeavouring to provide solid answers to their arguments, and do so in a spirit of gentleness and patience.

### 2. Avoid Quarrelling and Disputations

While accepting that it is essential to answer Muslim arguments, it needs also to be said that you should never let what started out as a healthy witness degenerate into nothing more than quarrelling and controversy. The Apostle Paul says:

Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. *2 Timothy 2.23-25*

Misconceptions must be gently but effectively removed wherever possible. A patient but well-reasoned answer may not immediately appear to have had an effect where the Muslim is either promoting his own triumphalism or is heated and aggressive and will not freely listen to you, but in the long term the impact will inevitably be more profound. When the atmosphere has quietened and the dust is no longer flying around your confident and assured response will be remembered. Whatever you do, do *not* be the one who first provokes arguments and disputes.

### 3. Be Serious About your Faith

Witnessing to God’s grace in Jesus Christ is one of the most important and serious things you can ever do in your life. In conversation with Muslims avoid flippancy and irreverence. Let the Muslim know, especially if he argues with you in a spirit of ridicule or casualness, that you take your faith very seriously and wish to discuss any points he may raise in that spirit.

Even in normal Christian witness it is important to maintain a right spirit and seriousness about your message. After all, you want *him* to be serious

about it too. Just recently, after a solid witness to a Muslim on all the greatest points of our Christian faith, I discovered on leaving his home that he supported the same English football team as me - Manchester United. As all good Muslims in South Africa support United (the rest back Liverpool and Arsenal) I immediately took the conversation to the team, knowing from experience that a shared interest is often a door to a Muslim's heart and interest in you. On this occasion, however, I discovered I had made a far greater impact than I had thought and he quickly changed the subject back to my message again. "My mother is a Christian and converted from Islam some years ago. She has a peace I genuinely want. I was really moved by your message and will keenly read your literature". I knew immediately that I had to leave him right there and promised to see him again soon. At such times the seriousness of our ministry to turn people to the knowledge of Jesus has to prevail. We must never lose it.

#### 4. Be Biblical in your Responses

I cannot emphasise this point strongly enough. When discussing the Trinity, for example, it is often tempting to reason theologically and doctrinally, trying to explain how God can be three persons in one being. I have often found that, after a while, I am as confused as the Muslim about this profound subject! There is so much of it that I do not understand and, quite frankly, do not think we are meant to understand. At other times Christians try to use illustrations to explain the doctrine, such as H<sub>2</sub>O which is a single substance but can be steam, water or ice. Or the egg illustration is used (yolk, white and shell in one egg). Muslims will hardly understand the Trinity through such reasonings. In the section on **The Father, Son and Holy Spirit** in this book I have shown how a Biblical presentation of the role of the three persons is without doubt the most powerful means of dealing with this subject while at the same time allowing you to resume the initiative and get back to genuine witnessing. The Bible itself says:

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. *Hebrews 4.12*

Know your Bible. The more you can master the Word of God, the more effective you will become in your discussions with Muslims. It is our finest handbook and is the means the Holy Spirit uses above all others to stir the hearer to respond to the Christian message. There is a power in the Word and very often, while finding myself on the defensive while trying to explain things in human terms, I have found that new authority comes once the Bible is quoted and again made the source of my witness. Often nothing needs to be proved - the Bible only needs to be quoted properly and it will make its own impact on the objector. Naturally, when the attack is on its own teaching and contents,

human reasoning is needed, but by keeping your response Biblical the greatest influence is likely to be obtained.

Try to avoid being rational or theological with Muslims. You cannot reason people into the kingdom of God - they need to respond to a message of God's grace and forgiveness from their hearts and that requires not just an assent to the truth but a repentance and conviction deep within. And the Bible is the best tool for achieving this end. Do what you can to get Muslims to read it!

#### 5. Use Objections as an Opportunity for Witness

This is my last point but most certainly not the least. It will appear constantly in this book. *Do what you can to use the Muslim's arguments to strengthen your witness to them.* It helps to get you back to where you really want to be - challenging the Muslim to respond to your message and the claims of Christ on his soul. Let's go back to an argument I have already mentioned, let's expand it a bit, and see how it can be turned around into an opportunity to emphasise the Gospel message.

The Muslim says "How can God let his Son die? We only regard Jesus Christ as a prophet and yet we honour him and God by believing that God delivered him from the cross. Yet you claim he was God's Son but teach that God did nothing while they crucified him. How can you expect us to believe this?" The argument is usually sincere - the Muslim genuinely believes its logic, especially as sons are treasured in Muslim families throughout the world.

One Muslim took it further with me. "How many sons have you got?" he asked me. I responded "two". "Well" he responded, "if you saw a group of thugs attacking just one of them and could see they were going to kill him, would you not go to his rescue? Do you not love your son?" As soon as you fall into the trap and simply answer "yes", the Muslim closes the argument - that is precisely what a good heavenly Father would have done for his Son.

I responded "Let me strengthen your argument further before I answer it. What if you saw *me* walking down the road with a knife in my own hand and my son in the other, intending to kill him *myself*. Would that not be far worse?" He agreed (and fell into my trap!). I continued "Then how can you believe that Abraham was such a great prophet and father when that is precisely what he did. He prepared one day to kill his own son according to the Qur'an (*Surah 37.102-103*). God told Moses 'You shall not kill' (*Exodus 20.13*) - How can you think well of Abraham when he was prepared to do this to his very own son?"

He emphatically replied (and I am quoting him!): "You do not understand. That was *different!* (my emphasis). It was a test of his *love* for God.



If a man will give his son for God, he'll give anything for him!" The door was open for a more effective witness than any normal presentation of the Gospel message would have achieved. "Exactly", I replied, "and that is precisely what we are saying about God. He did not stand by watching, he willingly gave his Son for us to save us from our sins. It was the greatest proof of his love that he likewise could have given. John 3.16!"

I continued "God spared the son of Abraham *but he did not spare his own Son*. God showed, in commanding Abraham to give the best proof of his love for God by sacrificing his son, just what he was going to do by giving the greatest manifestation of his love for us. Christians know that in the cross God has done the very best he could for us. Does Islam have anything to compare with this? Has Allah ever matched Abraham's supreme example of sacrificial love?"

What started as a Muslim offensive against the Gospel ended as a more purposeful witness than I could possibly have given had he never raised his arguments. Use Muslim arguments to strengthen your witness. Take the Muslim away from objections and disputes as far as you can and bring the discussion back to where it should be - evangelistic witness.

In conclusion I can only again emphasise that it is just as important to take care *how* you approach Muslims as *what* you actually say. Be sure that all you do and say is done in a spirit of genuine love for them.

John Gilchrist.  
Benoni, South Africa.

20th March 1999

# Chapter One

## The Integrity of the Bible

### The Textual Authenticity of the Qur'an and the Bible

#### 1.1 The Ancient Biblical Manuscripts

**Muslim:** *Your Bible does not contain the original scriptures revealed to Moses, Jesus and the other prophets. It has been changed many times. Our learned Maulanas have taught us this. What proofs do you have that your Bible is totally authentic and reliable?*

Many years ago a young Muslim woman asked me "Has the Bible ever been changed?" I answered that it most certainly had not, to which she responded "But does it not teach that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" I confirmed that it does - again and again - to which she replied "Then it *must* have been changed".

Any Christian who reads through the Muslim publications in the bibliography at the end of this book will be surprised to find that the arguments produced to disprove the integrity of the Bible are often extremely weak and unconvincing. There is only one reason for this - the Muslims do not believe that the Bible has been changed because they have discovered adequate evidences that it has but because they *have* to disprove its authenticity to maintain their conviction that the Qur'an is the Word of God. Two conflicting books cannot both be the Word of God. Once the Muslims discovered, in the early centuries of Islam, that the Bible emphatically taught fundamental Christian doctrines such as the deity and redeeming work of Jesus Christ they could no longer approach it objectively. Ever since they have sought to prove what is nothing more than a presupposition. The Bible *must* have been changed! The major reason why Muslims do not believe in its integrity is that they have no choice but to do so if they are to sustain their confidence in the Qur'an.

It is important to know what the evidences are for the Bible's textual authenticity, especially the fact that we have actual manuscripts going back

centuries before Islam that show that the Bible we have in our hands today is precisely that which the Jews and Christians of ancient times alone knew as their holy scripture.

## The Three Great Ancient Codices

There are three great manuscripts still existing of the Bible in Greek (containing the Septuagint of the Old Testament and original Greek text of the New) dating centuries before the time of Muhammad. They are:

### 1. Codex Alexandrinus

This volume, written in the fifth century after Christ, contains the whole Bible except for a few leaves lost from the New Testament (*Matthew 1.1 - 25.6, John 6.50 - 8.52 and 2 Corinthians 4.13 - 12.6*). Nothing is contained in it that is not part of our current Bible. The manuscript is in the British Museum in London.

### 2. Codex Sinaiticus

This very ancient text, dating from the late fourth century, contains the whole of the New Testament and much of the Old. Preserved for centuries in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg in Russia, it was sold for one hundred thousand pounds to the British Government and is also now kept in the British Museum.

### 3. Codex Vaticanus

Probably the oldest surviving manuscript of the whole Bible, it was written in the fourth century and is preserved in the Vatican Library in Rome. The last part of the New Testament from Hebrews 9.14 to the end of Revelation is written in a different hand to the rest of the manuscript (the original scribe probably was not able to complete the text through death or some other cause).

These manuscripts prove conclusively that the only scriptures in the hands of the Church at least two hundred years prior to Muhammad's time were the Old and New Testaments as we know them.

## Other Early Evidences of the Integrity of the Bible

There are numerous other evidences for the integrity of the Bible dating from many centuries before Islam. In discussion with Muslims you should emphasise the following:

### 1. The Hebrew Massoretic Texts

Not only do Christians possess early Biblical manuscripts but Jews likewise, who hold to the Old Testament as the only scripture ever written for them, possess texts in the original Hebrew language in which the Old Testament was originally written, going back at least a thousand years. They are known as the Massoretic texts.

### 2. The Dead Sea Scrolls

First discovered in caves in the wilderness of Qumran around the Dead Sea in Israel, these contain numerous portions of the Old Testament in the original Hebrew dating back to the second century *before* Christ. No less than two copies of the Book of Isaiah were included in this collection containing predictions of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*Isaiah 53.1-12*), his virgin-birth (*Isaiah 7.14*) and his deity (*Isaiah 9.6-7*).

### 3. The Septuagint

This is the title of the first translation of the Old Testament into Greek. It was likewise transcribed in the second century *before* Christ, containing all the great prophecies to the coming of the Messiah, the fact that he is the Son of God (*Psalms 2.7, 1 Chronicles 17.11-14*), as well as details of his suffering and atoning death (*Psalms 22 and 69*). The early Church freely used the Septuagint.

### 4. The Latin Vulgate

The Roman Catholic Church translated the whole Bible into Latin in the fourth century after Christ using the Septuagint and ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The Vulgate, like the Septuagint, dates from the fourth century after Christ and contains the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as we know them. It was established as the standard text for the Roman Church.

### 5. Portions of the Greek New Testament

There are numerous pages, fragments and portions of the original Greek New Testament surviving from as early as the second century after Christ. They all, taken together, form the contents of the New Testament as we know it. It is very interesting to compare this wealth of evidence with the texts which exist for the oldest of the Greek and Roman classics, many of which date not earlier than a thousand years after Christ. In fact no other ancient writings from the same era have such a mass of manuscript evidence as that for the Greek New Testament.

What is most important and must be emphasised with Muslims is that there is no alternative source of evidence suggesting that the life and teachings

of Jesus Christ were substantially other than that which is recorded in the Bible. All the apocryphal writings rejected by the Church at least generally follow the same threads as those in the New Testament manuscripts. Certainly no *historical* evidence from the same period exists to suggest that he was really the prophet of Islam which the Qur'an makes him out to be.

In conclusion it is useful to challenge the Muslim to produce historical evidences to substantiate their argument that the Bible as we know it has been changed. What was it originally? What, precisely, was changed to make it the book it is today? Who made these changes? When were they made? Once you challenge any Muslim to identify the actual people who are supposed to have corrupted the Bible, at what time in history it took place, and precisely what textual changes were made to original manuscripts, you will find them entirely unable to do so. Such evidences quite simply do not exist. Always remember - the Muslim onslaught comes not from a scholarly examination of the evidences but from a necessary presupposition. The Bible, in their minds, *must* have been changed if it contradicts the Qur'an and unfortunately Muslims all too often pick up a Bible, not to read it or understand its teachings, but purely to find fault with it to justify their prejudices against it.

## 1.2 The Early Different Qur'an Codices

**Muslim:** *Fortunately our Qur'an has been preserved intact without so much as a letter being lost or out of place. It has never been changed, unlike the Bible, and this proves undoubtedly that the Qur'an is the infallible Word of God.*

From early childhood Muslims are taught one of the greatest of all fallacies - that the Bible has been corrupted while the Qur'an has been miraculously safeguarded from change. The truth is that the evidence for the textual authenticity of the Bible is *far greater* than that for the Qur'an. Considering also the fact that the Bible contains sixty-six books compiled over a period of nearly two thousand years while the Qur'an, a much newer book, derives from only one man during a short period of twenty-three years, there is every good reason to believe that it is the Bible that has a greater claim to be the preserved Word of God. Let us consider, in contrast to the evidences we have for Biblical manuscripts, what happened to the earliest codices of the Qur'an.

### The Original Compilation of the Qur'an Text

During Muhammad's lifetime the Qur'an was fully never written down or collected into a single text. In one of the most reliable records of Muhammad's

life and teachings it is stated that the Qur'an came down to him most abundantly just before his death and that this period was the time of the greatest part of its revelation (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.474). Thus there was no reason to attempt to collect it into one book, especially as more portions could be expected as long as Muhammad remained alive.

It was only after Muhammad's death that the first attempts were made to compile written manuscripts of the whole Qur'an text. The same source states that Abu Bakr, Muhammad's immediate successor, encouraged a well-known reciter of the Qur'an, Zaid ibn-Thabit, to collect it. This young man recorded that he had to acquire it from *various* sources, namely palm-leaf stalks, thin white stones and other materials upon which parts of it had been recorded as well as from the memories from those who learnt it by heart. At least one verse was found with only one person, Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.478). Taken together, these were hardly the ideal source for a perfect, inerrant compilation.

At the time this manuscript had very little significance other than being commissioned by the Caliph himself. It receded into the private custody of Hafsa, one of the widows of Muhammad (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.478). Other codices were soon put together by close companions of Muhammad and it is important to be familiar with the most well-known.

#### 1. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud

He was one of the earliest converts to Islam and it is recorded that when Muhammad mentioned the four greatest authorities of the Qur'an from whom it should be learned, he deliberately mentioned Abdullah first (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.96). It is well-known that he compiled his own manuscript of the Qur'an while at Kufa where it became the official text. He is recorded as saying that no one knew the book better than he did (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.488).

#### 2. Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa.

He was the second person Muhammad mentioned in the list of four authorities. Although he was killed at the Battle of Yamama not long after Muhammad's death, it is reported that he was the first to collect the Qur'an into a *mushaf* - a manuscript or written codex (As Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Vol.1, p.135).

#### 3. Ubayy ibn Ka'b

Also named among the four, Muhammad is said to have been commanded by Allah to hear him recite portions of the Qur'an. He was known as the *sayid al-*

*qurra* (the master reciter) and also compiled his own text of the Qur'an which became the preferred text in Syria.

Numerous other codices were transcribed at the same time. Of these the manuscripts of Ali, Ibn Abbas, Abu Musa, Anas ibn Malik and Ibn az-Zubair are well-documented.

## Uthman's Order to Destroy the Other Codices

During the reign of Uthman, the third successor (caliph) to Muhammad, word came to him that the Muslims in the various provinces were differing considerably in their reading of the Qur'an. Uthman decided to unite the people on a *mushaf wahid* (single text) and, after calling for Zaid's codex which was conveniently in Medina in Hafsa's possession where the caliph had his seat of government, he ordered Zaid with three others to transcribe his manuscript into seven exact replica copies and to send one copy to each province with the order that all the other manuscripts of the Qur'an in existence be burnt (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.479). The codices of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b were specially singled out and both were destroyed.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud at first strongly resisted the order. Zaid's copy had never been standardised as an official text and it was used purely as a matter of convenience, being close at hand in Medina and not identified with any particular group of Muslims. Abdullah complained that he had directly obtained seventy surahs from Muhammad while Zaid was still a young child - why should he now forsake what he had acquired? (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.15). He also plainly stated that he preferred the Qur'anic recitation of Muhammad himself to that of Zaid, implying that he did not regard Zaid's codex as completely authentic and adding that "the people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an" (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.444).

Although there is abundant evidence that Zaid's codex was only one of a number of early manuscripts and had no grounds for being regarded as the best available, least of all a totally authentic copy, it became standardised by Uthman as the official text of the Qur'an and remains so to this day. Later in this chapter a comparison will be drawn of the hundreds of textual variant readings between all the early codices of the Qur'an and the few of the Bible. At this point, however, we need only consider the action of Uthman in consigning to the flames a number of handwritten manuscripts of the Qur'an compiled by some of the closest companions of Muhammad including two of the four he named as those who knew the Qur'an best and from whom it should be learned.

The Bible has only been burnt by its enemies. Uthman burnt *every other manuscript* of the Qur'an other than the one he conveniently had at hand. Codices that had been widely recognised as authoritative texts in the various provinces were burnt in favour of a manuscript that Hafsa had simply kept under her bed! This action contrasts most unfavourably with the evidences we have considered for the Biblical texts.

## 1.3 The Passages in Mark 16 and John 8

**Muslim:** *There are two passages in the Gospels which appear in some of the ancient manuscripts but not in others. Some editions of the RSV Bible include them in the text while others omit them. Does this not prove conclusively the Bible has been changed?*

Despite the great length of the Bible (it is five times the length of the Qur'an) there are only two passages about which there can be any question of their authenticity. They fill less than a page of a book consisting of more than a thousand pages. Let us consider them.

### Mark 16.9-20: The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

This passage describes a number of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and his ascension to heaven. It does not appear in the very oldest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel but concludes the book in many of the Greek texts dating shortly after those manuscripts. Did someone interpolate Mark's Gospel with this short passage? As no other case is known of the possible addition of any passage to the Christian scriptures making up the New Testament (other than John 8.1-11) it is highly unlikely that this section was fabricated some centuries after the book was originally written and that it gained acceptance somehow as part of the text. It is far more probable that it is authentic and was omitted from the earliest texts as a result of unknown circumstances.

Each of the four Gospels has a conclusion. Without this passage Mark's Gospel ends abruptly. It records an appearance to three women by an angel who tells them to go to Galilee where they would see Jesus. It is most unlikely that the Gospel would end here without further reference to what happened to him. Another issue is whether it teaches anything contrary to the rest of the New Testament. These points are relevant:

#### 1. Jesus' Appearance to Mary Magdalene

Verses 9-11 record that he first appeared on the day of his resurrection to Mary Magdalene. The incident is reported in greater detail in John 20.11-18.

## 2. A Further Appearance to Two Followers

Another brief reference follows outlining Jesus' interaction with two of his disciples later the same day. This incident is likewise outlined in specific detail in Luke 24.13-35.

## 3. His Commission to his Eleven Disciples

Following this is an appearance to his eleven remaining disciples (after the demise of Judas) where he met with them as they sat at table. A commission to preach the Gospel to the whole creation follows with certain statements about it. The incident, once again, has parallels in Matthew 28.19 and Luke 24.36-43.

## 4. Jesus' Ascension to Heaven

The passage concludes with a brief statement that Jesus thereafter ascended to heaven while his disciples went out and preached his message everywhere. This likewise is confirmed in the first chapter of Acts.

There is nothing in this passage which is not repeated elsewhere in the New Testament. What the Muslims need is to prove that the present teachings of the Christian Bible are not what was originally recorded and that the whole book has been changed from what was allegedly a scripture originally consistent with Islam. Arguments around this passage do not remotely canvass the real issue. Nothing here conflicts with the overall contents of the New Testament and, as has been seen, every incident recorded has parallels elsewhere in the book.

## John 8.1-11: The Woman Caught in Adultery

The only other passage about which there is any uncertainty in the New Testament is the story about Jesus and the woman caught in adultery recorded in John 8.1-11. Some ancient manuscripts include it right here, others omit it completely while some others have added it as an appendix to Luke's Gospel. There seems to have been a general consensus in early Christian times that it was genuine save that its exact location was disputed. There are, in fact, a number of reasons to conclude that it was originally part of John's Gospel just where it stands today - at the beginning of the eighth chapter.

### 1. The Contrasting Ministry of Moses and Jesus

Throughout this Gospel a contrast is drawn between the limited ministry of Moses and the fulfilment of all God's purposes in Jesus Christ. "The law was

given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (*John 1.17*) sums this principle up. For example, although Moses fed the people with bread for forty years, they still died. He who feeds on Jesus who is the bread of eternal life will, however, live forever (*John 6.31-35*). Likewise people could be circumcised on the sabbath simply to comply with the law of Moses - how much more could a man's whole body be made well on the sabbath by Jesus. (*John 7.23*) So in this passage the law of Moses convicted the woman involved of adultery but, under the light of Jesus' teaching and presence, all present left the scene convicted of sin (*John 8.7-9*). The woman, however, was left to experience the saving grace that Jesus brought (*John 8.10-11*).

### 2. Jesus' Use of the Term "Woman"

When all the Jewish leaders had departed from the scene Jesus addressed the adulterous woman "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (*John 8.10*). This unusual use of the vocative "Woman" by Jesus as a personal mark of respect (like "Sir") appears again in John's Gospel on a number of occasions (*John 2.4, 4.21, 20.15*) but does not appear in the other Gospels.

### 3. The Logical Sequence of Events

The Pharisees, who are not mentioned in this Gospel until now, suddenly appear without introduction in discussion with Jesus in John 8.13. The introduction clearly appears in John 8.3. Likewise the heated debate between them and Jesus which follows in the rest of the chapter is obviously a consequence of the narrative recorded in John 8.1-11. Throughout his Gospel John records incidents in the life of Jesus which gave rise to discourses and debates with the Jewish leaders (*cf John 6.1-59*) and without the story of the woman caught in adultery and subsequent interaction of Jesus with them this trend is uncharacteristically broken.

### 4. Jesus and Moses: Conviction of Sin

In the debate with these leaders Jesus interjected "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (*John 8.46*). This statement would be somewhat isolated had the incident with the woman not occurred. It is here that Jesus boldly declares to them "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her" (*John 8.7*). One by one, in response to this challenge, they left the scene, beginning from the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman before him. The thrust is clear - he had convicted them all of sin - which one of them could do the same to him in return?

There is considerable, if not convincing, evidence that John 8.1-11 belongs just where it is found. In any event yet again there is nothing in the



This passage could well have once belonged to the Surah as it fits well into its context and contains words found elsewhere in it, namely *din* (religion, v.5), *aml*, (to do, v.7) and *hunafa* (upright, v.4). The Surah also contrasts the way of Allah with the Jews and Christians in other passages in the text and it is a good example of a verse now missing from the Qur'an.

## 2. Stoning of Adulterers to Death

Umar ibn al-Khattab, one of the very closest companions of Muhammad and his second successor, taught plainly from the pulpit in Medina while he was Caliph that whereas Surah 24.2 teaches that adulterers should be lashed with a hundred stripes, a verse in the Qur'an originally stipulated that married men and women who commit adultery were to be stoned to death:

See that you do not forget the verse about stoning and say: We do not find it in the Book of Allah; the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) had ordered stoning and we too have done so, after him. By the Lord Who holds possession of my life, if people should not accuse me of adding to the Book of Allah, I would have had this transcribed therein: "The adult men and women who commit adultery, stone them". We have read this verse. (*Muwatta Imam Malik, p.352*)

Various other sources confirm that this verse was originally part of the Qur'an but is now missing from it. One quotes Umar as saying that part of the scripture revealed to Muhammad was the *ayatur-rajam* (the Stoning Verse) and that they memorised, understood and recited it. He added that he feared people in time to come, on finding no mention of the verse in the Qur'an, would forget the ordinance (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.8, p.539*).

## 3. Being the Offspring of Fathers Alone

Another verse said by Umar to have been originally part of the *kitabullah* (the "Book of Allah", that is, the Qur'an) but which, by his time as caliph, had been lost from its text read as follows:

O people! Do not claim to be the offspring of other than your fathers, as it is disbelief on your part that you claim to be the offspring of other than your real father. (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.8, p.540*)

## 4. The Good Pleasure of Allah

Anas ibn Malik, another companion of Muhammad, taught that the following verse originally formed part of the Qur'an but was later abrogated and deleted from its text:

Convey to our people on our behalf the information that we have met our Lord, and He is pleased with us, and has made us pleased. (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.5, p.288*)

It is also recorded that this text was "sent down in a Qur'an verse until it was withdrawn" (As-Suyuti, *Al Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an, p.527*). It is yet another proof that the Qur'an has not been preserved free from any change, alteration or omission as Muslims believe. Instead the evidences for missing passages from the Qur'an are, as we can see, far greater than those for the Bible.

## 5. Marriage Between People Fed by the same Mother

Yet another tradition reported from Ayishah, one of Muhammad's wives, states that there was once a passage in the Qur'an which taught that, if two people had been fed at the breast of the same mother at least ten times, they could not marry. Later, she said, it was reduced to five:

A'isha (Allah be pleased with her) reported that it had been revealed in the Holy Qur'an that ten clear sucklings made the marriage unlawful, then it was abrogated by five sucklings and Allah's Apostle (saw) died and it was before that time in the Holy Qur'an. (*Sahih Muslim, Vol.2, p.740*)

These are only a selection of evidences that the Qur'an is an incomplete book. Christians should use these proofs with Muslims to show that their challenges about the textual integrity of the Bible can very easily - and far more effectively - be turned on the Qur'an. As the saying goes, people in glass houses should not throw stones.

## 1.5 Variant Readings in the New Testament

**Muslim:** *There are a number of examples in the Bible of verses that appear in some manuscripts and not in others. Other types of variant reading can also be found. How can your Bible be the true Word of God if its text cannot be completely verified?*

Muslims fondly believe that the Qur'an is a perfect book, that not a dot or letter has been altered or omitted, and that this miraculous state of preservation of the book proves it is the Word of God. At the same time any proof whatsoever is sought to show that the Bible has been changed and cannot therefore be regarded as reliable. We do not believe a book has to be perfectly intact to be the authentic Word of God but rather that, if it has been protected and handed down in its original form with only a few copyist errors, negligible

variant readings and one or two uncertain passages, its overall integrity cannot be challenged. As we have seen and will again see in the next section, the Qur'an in any event has not been perfectly transcribed and in fact suffers from far more variant readings, lost passages and the like than the Bible.

## The Few Variants in the New Testament

It is remarkable that the Biblical text as it has been preserved has no more than a few variant readings, about twenty in all, and that they all come from the New Testament. As Kenneth Cragg has pointed out, only a one-thousandth part of the book is affected. This is hardly the sort of proof the Muslims need to prove that the Bible, as a whole, has been so dramatically changed that it no longer contains what was originally written.

What is more, none of the New Testament variants remotely affects the teaching of the book as a whole and some of them in any event have parallels in other Gospels where the text is virtually repeated. Let us consider some of these variant readings as typical examples.

### 1. Mark 15.28: A Quote from Isaiah 53.12

A verse, found in some of the ancient copies of Mark's Gospel but not in others, reads: "And the scripture was fulfilled which says 'He was reckoned with the transgressors'" (*Mark 15.28*). The passage referred to is from the great passage of Messianic suffering in Isaiah 53.12. It is repeated, however, in much the same form in the following quote which appears in every surviving copy of Luke's Gospel: "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with the transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment" (*Luke 22.37*).

This passage from Mark's Gospel, like all the others in the New Testament, in no way disturbs the overall text. A scratch on a Rolls-Royce may slightly impair its perfection, but it does not stop the car from being a Rolls-Royce or turn it into some other vehicle.

### 2. Matthew 21.44: Being Broken by a Falling Stone

In the parable of the tenants in the vineyard recorded in Matthew's Gospel the following saying of Jesus is found in a few of the most ancient manuscripts of the book but not in the rest: "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him" (*Matthew 21.44*).

The text, however, is repeated almost word-for-word in Luke 20.18. Thus the variant has no effect on the text as a whole. The same applies to Matthew 23.14 which contains another saying of Jesus pronouncing a woe upon the Pharisees for devouring widow's houses. It is only found in some of the earliest manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel but is again repeated in every manuscript of Mark's Gospel (*Mark 12.40*).

### 3. Matthew 27.49: The Piercing of Jesus' Side

Once again in some manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel these words appear: "And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood" (*Matthew 27.49*). The statement is paralleled in John 19.34 where it appears in every manuscript of the Gospel.

### 4. 1 John 5.7: The Father, Word and Holy Ghost

In this case we consider a verse which appears in *none* of the ancient Greek manuscripts, the original language of the New Testament scriptures, but which can be traced back to the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate. From here it appears in much later Greek transcripts of the New Testament and, as the King James Version of the Bible (best defined as the King James English translation) was based on these texts, it found its way into the translation.

The verse reads: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one" (*1 John 5.7*). As the verse does not appear in any of the oldest texts of John's Gospel it is probable that it was a marginal note of a scribe, a complement to the rest of the verse which reads "There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree".

Muslims have made great efforts to discredit the integrity of the Bible text with the disputed verse, claiming it is the only passage in the Bible which teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. Conveniently overlooked is an equally dogmatic trinitarian statement, "Baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (*Matthew 28.19*) as well as similar statements in 2 Corinthians 13.14 and Ephesians 2.18.

There are a number of cases in the New Testament, mainly in the four Gospels, where slight variant readings occur affecting single words, brief expressions or short clauses. Once again, none of them affects the teaching of the book as a whole or its overall authenticity.

The variant readings in the Bible are so easily accounted for and of such little importance that they in no way affect the integrity of the book as a



whole. The scriptures, in their entirety, have been preserved for us virtually unaltered, unlike the Qur'an where every manuscript transcribed by Muhammad's own companions except one was cast into the flames to be destroyed.

## 1.6 Evidences of Qur'anic Variant Readings

**Muslim:** *There are no variant readings affecting the actual text of the Qur'an. In the early days the Qur'an was recited in different dialects which only affected the pronunciation of its verses. That is why the early manuscripts were burnt - to eliminate these differences of pronunciation alone.*

This statement, which is self-evidently illogical, is typical of most Muslim explanations for the burning by Uthman of all but one of the codices compiled by Muhammad's companions which contained a variety of variant readings. Pronunciations have nothing to do with written texts. You cannot burn differences of dialect in common speech! There must have been *real textual differences* between the various written manuscripts for such a drastic order to be given.

During the time of Uthman the Qur'an was still best known in the memories of most of the Muslims and the burning order did not eliminate the knowledge of what the variant readings were. Over a period of time historians of the text of the Qur'an such as **Ibn Abi Dawud** who compiled a record of these variants which he titled *Kitab al-Masahif* (Book of the Manuscripts), and *Muhammad Abu Jafar at-Tabari*, author of the monumental work on the Qur'an titled *Jami al-Bayan fii Tafsir al-Qur'an* (A Comprehensive Compilation for a Commentary of the Qur'an), preserved a record of all the known variants between the various texts.

### The Differences Between the Earliest Texts

The evidences, especially from at-Tabari's extensive records, show that there were literally hundreds of variant readings between the early manuscripts. Arthur Jeffery, who compiled a catalogue of the different readings mainly from Ibn Abi Dawud's and at-Tabari's works, listed them over no less than *three hundred and sixty-two pages* of his book **Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an**. His book also contains the whole text of Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif*. They make the number of Biblical variants seem negligible in comparison and, once again, it has to be remembered that the Bible is centuries

older than the Qur'an, five times its length, and was compiled by numerous authors over a two-thousand year period.

When Muslims argue that the Bible has been changed it will be very useful to mention some of the numerous variant readings known from these early writings. Some interesting examples are the following:

#### 1. The Day of Resurrection

Surah 2.275 begins with the words "Those who devour usury will not stand" (*Allathiina yaakuluunar-ribaa laa yaquumuuna*). The reading of Ibn Mas'ud was the same except that he added the words *yawmal qiyaamati* - "on the Day of Resurrection". This variant is mentioned in Abu Ubaid's *Kitab Fadhail al-Qur'an* and was also recorded in the codex of Talha ibn Musarrif.

#### 2. Fasting for Three Successive Days

Surah 5.91 as it stands in the Qur'an today contains the exhortation "Fast for three days" (*fasiyaamu thalaathatiu ayyaamin*). Ibn Mas'ud's text included the adjective *mutataabi'aatin*, meaning "fast for three **successive** days". At-Tabari records the variant (7.19.11) as did Abu Ubaid. Ubayy ibn Ka'b also recorded it as did Ibn Abbas and Ar-Rabi ibn Khuthaim.

#### 3. The Path of Allah

Surah 6.153 in the Qur'an begins "Verily this is my path" (*wa anna haathaa siraati*). Ibn Mas'ud, in place of this clause, read "This is the path of your Lord" (*wa haathaa siraatu rabbakum*). At-Tabari is once again the source of the variant (8.60.16). Ubayy ibn Ka'b, the other great expert of the Qur'an text and close companion of Muhammad, had the same reading except that he read *rabbika for rabbakum*. Other variants around this text have also been recorded.

#### 4. The Mothers of the Believers

Surah 33.6 says of Muhammad and all believing Muslims "his wives are their mothers" (*azwajuuhuu ummahaatuhuu*). At-Tabari once again records a major variant reading (21.70.8), namely that Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b included the words apparently now missing from the Qur'an text "and he is their father" (*wa huwa abuu laahum*). Ibn Abbas, Ikrima and Mujahid ibn Jabir also recorded it. The number of witnesses to its conclusion suggests that Zaid's text (the current Qur'an) overlooked its inclusion.

These are merely four of the vast collection of variant readings that exist. There are so many (well over **two thousand** in fact) that it is remarkable

to behold the confidence with which Muslims attack the integrity of the Bible. Most of the time they have quite simply been kept in the dark about the manner in which the Qur'an was standardised from a wealth of variant readings into the text we have today.

## Changes to the Qur'an made by Al-Hajjaj

There is clear evidence in the *Kitab al-Masahif* of Ibn Abi Dawud that no less than **eleven changes** were made to individual words in the Qur'an by the scribe al-Hajjaj on the orders of his caliph, Abd al-Malik. His book contains a chapter headed *Bab: Ma Ghaira al-Hajjaj fii Mushaf Uthman* ("Chapter: What was Changed by Al-Hajjaj in the Uthmanic text"). His text begins:

Altogether al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf made eleven modifications in the reading of the Uthmanic text. In al-Baqarah (Surah 2.259) it originally read Lam yatassana waandhur, but it was altered to Lam yatassanah.  
(Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.117)

Some of the other changes to the Qur'an made at this time as recorded in this chapter were the following:

1. *Shariy'ah* was changed to *shir'ah* (law) in Surah 5.48;
2. *Yuthasharukum* was altered to *yusayyirukum* (travel) in Surah 10.22;
3. *Ma'a'ishahum* was changed to read *ma'ishatahum* (livelihood) in Surah 43.32;
4. *Yasin* was changed to *Aasin* (brackish) in Surah 47.15.

In each of these cases, as in the other seven recorded, the variant reading is generally only of a letter or two, but it once again is not confined to pronunciation but reflects an actual change in the consonantal text, thus undermining the Muslim claim that not even one letter in the Qur'an has ever been altered. The word Ibn Abi Dawud always uses in between each alternative is *faghyirah* meaning "changed, altered, replaced by, or varied" - words Muslims would not like to find used at such an early date to explain alterations in the Qur'an!

## Dialects and the Text of the Qur'an

It is very important to know that there were no **vowel points** in the earliest Qur'an manuscripts. Written Arabic has no vowels and it took centuries before

vowel points were added to the Qur'an. The oldest Qur'an texts surviving to this day date not earlier than at least a hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death and are written in the al-ma'il script of Medina. Most other ancient Qur'an scripts surviving are in *kufic* script, a bold form of writing which first came from Kufa in Iraq.

Claims are made to this day that original Uthmanic manuscripts survive, even with his bloodstains on a page he was reading when he was assassinated. One such manuscript is in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul and another is the famous Samarqand Codex of Tashkent. Both were written in kufic script and date at least a century after Uthman's time.

As stated already, the favourite Muslim argument used to sustain the hypothesis that the Qur'an text today is an exact replica of the original is that the only variant readings which existed in the early years were in dialectal pronunciation. The evidences prove conclusively otherwise. Such differences would not have appeared in the written text and, in fact, countless different forms of reading survived for at least three centuries until Ibn Mujahid, a well-known authority on the Qur'an at the Abbasid court in Baghdad, ordered that only seven be authorised in terms of a tradition from Muhammad himself that the Qur'an had been revealed in "seven different ways" and that each Muslim could choose whichever was easiest for him to read (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.510).

All the variant readings recorded in at-Tabari's *Jami* and Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* as well as other similar records are of substantial differences in the actual written text, its words and expressions, its consonants and clauses. There were so many that Uthman simply had no alternative but to order the destruction of all but one which was conveniently standardised as the only official text of the Qur'an. This sequence of events in the early days makes the history of the Qur'an text appear decidedly unfavourable when compared with the text of the Bible.

## Biblical Contents and Teaching

### 1.7 Apparent Errors in Biblical Numerics

**Muslim:** *There are occasions in the Bible where obvious contradictions appear between parallel passages where the figures given are not the same. These discrepancies and factual errors prove the Bible is unreliable and cannot be the Word of God.*

Muslim writers often fasten on to a few parallel passages in the Old Testament where there certainly are apparent contradictions between the numbers and ages given in narratives of specific events. It is not only important to know them but also to be aware, once again, of precisely the same phenomenon in the Qur'an!

## Copyist Errors in the Old Testament

There are four examples from the whole text of the book which we will consider as typical of the problem. In each case, although Muslims claim that they are evidences of wholesale contradictions which must be the errors of the original authors, it will be obvious that the problem arises solely from **copyist errors** made during transmission of the text.

### 1. The Reigns of Jehoiachin and Ahaziah, Kings of Judah

In one passage the Bible states that "Jehoiachin was **eighteen** years old when he became king" (2 Kings 24.8) while in another it says "Jehoiachin was **eight** years old when he began to reign" (2 Chronicles 36.9). All that has happened here is that the single Jewish letter for "ten" was omitted during copying of the text of 2 Chronicles by a Jewish scribe over two thousand years ago.

A similar distinction occurs here between one passage which states that "Ahaziah was **twenty-two** years old when he began to reign" (2 Kings 8.26) and another which records "Ahaziah was **forty-two** years old when he began to reign" (2 Chronicles 22.2). Apart from this discrepancy the texts agree that he reigned only one year and that his mother was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. Once again, in the original Hebrew, the difference between the two ages is represented in only one letter. Again the error would have occurred solely in the *copying* of the text. It is obvious that the second age is incorrect for, if Ahaziah had been forty-two years old when his reign began he would have been two years older than his father!

### 2. David's Charioteers and Solomon's Stalls

In one passage in the Old Testament it says that "David slew of the Syrians the men of **seven hundred** chariots" (2 Samuel 10.18) while in another it is recorded that "David slew of the Syrians the men of **seven thousand** chariots" (1 Chronicles 19.18). There are marked resemblances between Jewish numerical letters and here, as in the other examples quoted, the difference in the original text affects but one letter which is very similar in each book. We have but another case of an obvious copyist error which in no way affects the text of

the Bible or its teaching in any significant way. The same applies to a verse which states that Solomon had **forty thousand** stalls of horses (1 Kings 4.26) in comparison with another which states that the number was **four thousand** (2 Chronicles 9.25).

In all these cases and others Muslims might quote the issue is often a *fractional difference* in the transcribing of a letter in the original Hebrew text. This sort of hair-splitting argument does not begin to deal with the key issue which is the integrity of the Bible as a whole, especially its Christian (rather than Islamic) content and emphasis.

## Contradictions in Qur'anic Numerics

There are more obvious discrepancies in certain similar numerical excerpts from the Qur'an. Here we do not find the problem confined to single, very similar letters but rather to whole words which create obvious contradictions. Two examples should be learned by Christians and quoted whenever Muslims attack the numerical differences we have mentioned.

### 1. The Length of the Day of Judgment

According to one text the Great Day of God will be "a **thousand** years of your reckoning" (Surah 32.5) while in another it is said that the measure of the same Day will be "**as fifty thousand** years" (Surah 70.4). In this case the distinction is far more obvious for it is not confined to one letter but a whole word, namely *khamshiina* ("fifty") which appears in the second text in addition to the words *alfa sanat* ("A thousand years"). Muslims hide in the clouds by explaining the contradiction away as an example of "mystical", "cosmic" or "allegorical" language. But, as the first text states clearly that the length of the Day will be a thousand years "of *your* reckoning" (meaning precisely as we would measure it on earth), there is a very real contradiction between the two texts that cannot easily be explained. How can one thousand and fifty thousand revolutions of the earth around the sun be exactly the same?

### 2. The Original Creation of the Heavens and the Earth.

In one Qur'anic passage it is said that the heavens, the earth, and all that is between them were created in six days (Surah 50.38) while another teaches that the earth was made in two days, the heavens likewise in two, and the earth's sustenance between them in four days (Surah 41.9-12), making **eight** days in all in anyone's simple mathematics. Once again it is hard to reconcile the two texts with the contradiction being found not in solitary letters but in a whole calculation of different time periods.

One of the problems Christians experience in witness with Muslims is the tendency of the latter to set unreasonable standards for the authenticity of the Bible which they somehow cannot see can be applied with greater forcefulness against the Qur'an. They begin with the premise that to be the Word of God a book cannot have numerical errors, variant readings and the like. Fondly believing the Qur'an is free from such defects they freely launch into attacks on the integrity of the Biblical text.

Christians need to know the evidences that show that the textual integrity of the Qur'an can be challenged on precisely the same grounds as the Muslims live under the fond illusion (and are taught by their *maulanas* and leaders from childhood) that the Qur'an is a perfect book without contradictions, different readings and the like. The aim must be not to win an argument or discredit the Qur'an but simply to counter false and unjustifiable attacks on the Bible.

## 1.8 The Authorship of Matthew's Gospel

**Muslim:** *Matthew was not the author of the Gospel attributed to him. There are proofs that it was written long after his time by another author whose identity is unknown.*

At time it seems Muslims will use any argument they can to discredit the Bible. More than once I have heard Muslims challenge the authorship of Matthew's Gospel. The argument is usually centred on the following text from the Gospel itself:

As Jesus passed on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me". And he rose and followed him.

*Matthew 9.9*

Although the earliest Christian sources all attribute this Gospel to the Apostle Matthew, Muslims argue that he cannot have written it because he describes his own conversion in the third person in this verse. More than one Muslim author has claimed that a first-person account of the incident should have been given if Matthew himself was the author of the Gospel attributed to him.

One can only marvel at times at the manner in which Muslims set themselves up as judges of the Biblical text and prescribe what *should* have been done. When approaching any book like the Bible or the Qur'an, a far better approach is to let the book speak for itself and to apply a scholarly approach to its contents. Too often the aim is purely to find fault by whatever means possible.

In response to a Muslim who once challenged me on this very issue during a personal conversation I replied "Who is the author of the Qur'an?" He immediately answered "Allah" to which I responded "How is it, then, that Allah likewise constantly refers to himself in the third person in the book?" I used the following verse as an example:

He is Allah and there is no god besides who He is. *Surah 59.22*

The Arabic begins *Huwallaah* ("He is Allah") and finishes with the same pronoun it begins with, *huwa* ("he is"). In both cases the pronoun used is the **third person** singular. Allah, too, is mentioned by name just as he is nearly three thousand other times in the book. If Matthew cannot be the author of his Gospel because he both names and speaks of himself in the third person in the book, then Allah - by the same Muslim reasoning - cannot be the author of the Qur'an. There is quite simply no difference between these two uses of the third person in the Bible and the Qur'an.

Christians often justifiably become frustrated at the manner in which Muslims try to discredit the Bible. Often their arguments are extremely weak and can be turned equally effectively against the Qur'an. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that they are trying to prove a case by whatever means they can and that they base their arguments on convenient presuppositions rather than solid evidences. Christianity stands on its own and its historical records of the life of Jesus as found in the Gospels. It does not need to disprove a religion which only came six hundred years later. Islam, on the other hand, because it acknowledges Jesus but has no alternative historical records of his life, has to disprove Christianity to establish itself. This is why the Qur'an itself constantly argues against Christian beliefs and practices and is also why Muslims try so hard to discredit the Bible. As long as Christians remember this they will be patient in dealing with argumentative Muslims, especially when they tend to resort to any means they can to attempt to prove their point.

## Other Arguments Against Matthew's Gospel

Very often Muslims acquire arguments against the integrity of the Bible from the writings of modern liberal Western scholars basing their conclusions on what has become known as "higher criticism" of the Biblical text. Almost invariably this source is highly questionable as such authors do not simply assess the evidences but work on all manner of assumptions.

A typical example is the hypothesis in many such works that behind the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) there was an original source



revised but only an English translation and that the purpose was not to corrupt the original text but rather to get as close to it as the translators possibly could.

## Certain Differences in Translation

Muslims do, however, endeavour to make something of certain differences between the King James Version and Revised Standard Version. Two passages will be mentioned and dealt with as typical of the type of arguments Christians can expect to hear with indications of how to respond to them.

### 1. Isaiah 7.14: Young Woman or Virgin?

In the King James Version this verse states that a **virgin** would conceive and bear a son whereas the same text in the Revised Standard Version states that a **young woman** would do so. These are merely differences in translations of the original Hebrew word *almah* but Muslims have endeavoured to use the different choice of words as a proof of a change in the Bible.

The argument goes that the Bible originally taught that Jesus would be born of a virgin-woman but that a later edition has revised the text, eliminating a fundamental truth supported by the Qur'an (*Surah 3.47, 19.20-21*). The Christian response to this argument is quite simple. Firstly the original Hebrew word in the original text is *almah* and that it has never been changed. Therefore the issue is purely one of translation.

Secondly, the word literally translated means a **young woman** and the Revised Standard Version's translation is perfectly accurate. The normal Hebrew word for "virgin" is *bethulah*. On the other hand, from the context of the passage it is quite obvious that the conception by a young woman would be unique and a dramatic sign to the people of Israel and the King James Version quite fairly interprets this to mean what is obviously intended, namely that a **virgin** would conceive. The Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament, dating nearly two thousand years before the King James Version, also translated it "virgin" and either term is quite acceptable. There is, therefore, no question of a "change" to the Bible at this point.

### 2. John 3.16: God's Only Begotten Son

A similar argument centres on the translation of this verse in the same two Versions. In the former, the King James Version which dates back to 1611 AD, the verse states that God so loved the world that he sent his **only-begotten Son** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. In the Revised Standard

Version, dating from 1952, the verse simply says that God would send his **only Son**, leaving out the word "begotten".

Muslims argue that the Bible has been changed to remove the objectionable idea that God has "begotten" a Son, a concept very forcefully rejected in the Qur'an which states:

Say he is Allah the One, Allah the Eternal One. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and like unto him there is not one. *Surah 112.1-4*

Once again the Muslims are making capital of absolutely nothing. The Greek word in the original text is *monogenae* which means "the one" (*mono*) "coming from" (*genae*) the Father. It is quite correct to translate this as "only" or "only begotten". Both expressions mean the same thing - the *only son coming from the Father*.

The word **begotten** is an old English word freely used in the seventeenth century when the King James Version was written but one which is not part of twentieth-century spoken English. This is why the Revised Standard Version omits it. Yet again there is no question of a "change" in the original text - the issue is purely one of interpretation in English translations.

Over the years I have heard an assortment of arguments against the Bible which have taxed my patience with Muslims. "Why are there four Bibles in your New Testament?" is one, another being "Why do your Popes change the Bible every year? It is not only the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope of the Baptist Church does the same". Another classic: "According to the Qur'an only one *Injil*, the "Gospel", was revealed to Jesus. But in your Bible there are many Gospels. Matthew wrote a Gospel, so did Mark, Luke, John and Acts. Romans wrote a Gospel and Corinthians wrote two!"

While you may wish to focus purely on the actual Gospel itself and the effect of God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ it is important to answer Muslim arguments against the Bible, even when they are poor and irrelevant to the real issues between us. It is my personal experience that a positive, effective answer to each point patiently argued can go a long way to convincing the Muslim that the message you really want to present needs to be seriously considered.

## 1.10 The Genealogy of Jesus in the Gospels

**Muslim:** *The genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels give very different lines of descent. How do you explain this contradiction? Also, some of the women mentioned among his ancestors were very great sinners - how*

*could the perfectly pure Son of God have been descended from such an impure ancestry?*

Very often Muslim arguments against the Bible reveal little more than a serious lack of awareness of what Christianity is really all about. In answering these two objections Christians not only have an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings but also to witness to the Muslims who raise them of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It needs to be emphasised again and again that every Muslim argument against the Bible should be seen as an open door to witness to its essential message.

## The Two Different Genealogies

The Hebrew line of Jesus' descent is recorded in both Matthew 1.2-16 and Luke 3.23-38. There is no difference between these two records from Abraham to David but thereafter they diverge considerably. Matthew traces the line of Jesus' genealogy through David's son Solomon while Luke takes it through his son Nathan. From there on the two accounts are very different. Muslim writers have summarily concluded that they are contradictory and cannot be reconciled. The following points should be raised in reply whenever Muslims raise this issue:

### 1. Every Child has Two Genealogies

It is hardly necessary to say that every man on earth has two lines of ancestry, one through his father and another through his mother. The one obvious thing about the two genealogies in the Gospels is that each is traced to a common source, David, and from there consistently to Abraham. What the two lines reveal, upon a close study of their context in each respective Gospel, is that **Joseph**, the legal guardian and registered father of Jesus (although not his natural father) was descended from David through **Solomon** while his mother **Mary** was descended from the same ancestor through **Nathan**. Thus there is no contradiction between them.

### 2. Matthew and Luke Clearly State their Lines of Descent

It is not a convenient assumption that these two Gospel writers are recording the paternal and maternal sequences of Jesus' ancestry respectively. Matthew makes it plain that he is recording the line of Joseph (*Matthew 1.16*) and throughout the first two chapters of his Gospel we find Joseph to be the central character. Each appearance of the Angel Gabriel recorded here is to Joseph. In Luke's Gospel, however, Mary is always the central personality and only the appearance of Gabriel to her is mentioned.

### 3. Luke Deliberately Qualifies his Genealogy

Luke himself states specifically that Jesus was the son, "as was supposed", of Joseph (*Luke 3.23*) and it is in this little expression that the key to Jesus' genealogy in his Gospel is found. Unlike Matthew he mentions no women in Jesus' ancestry and, to maintain the general practice of outlining the masculine order only, Luke records Joseph as the *supposed* father of Jesus. He very carefully qualified Joseph's role so that it would be clear that he was not recording the genealogy of Jesus through his representative father but rather his *actual* genealogy through his real mother Mary.

## The Four Women Named in Matthew's Genealogy

Muslim writers have often tried to discredit the absolute purity of Jesus as the Son of God by referring to the four women Matthew names in his record of Jesus' ancestry. They are **Tamar**, who committed incest with her father Judah from which Perez was born as a forefather of Jesus; **Rahab**, the prostitute and Gentile woman who helped Joshua and the Israelites at the conquest of Jericho; **Ruth**, the wife of Boaz who was also a Gentile; and **Bathsheba**, the wife of Uriah who committed adultery with David and from whom Solomon was born.

It is obvious that Matthew has *deliberately* named the very four women who disturbed the genealogy of Jesus by having moral or ethnic defects. He, clearly, did not think he was undermining the dignity of Jesus in doing so. Had there been any stigma attaching to such an ancestry he would assuredly have named some of more famous Hebrew women from whom Jesus was descended like Sarah and Rebecca. Why, therefore, did he specifically name the four women who supposedly unsettled the "purity" of his ancestry? The Apostle gives the answer himself. He records that, when the Angel Gabriel came to Joseph, he said of the child to be born:

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.  
*Matthew 1.21*

It was precisely for people such as incestuous Tamar, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Gentile and Bathsheba the adulteress that Jesus came into the world. He descended from the holy portals of heaven and took human form in a sinful and decaying world so that he could save his people from their iniquities and make his salvation available to all men and women, Jew and Gentile alike. In another passage recorded in the same Gospel we find Jesus making his purpose very clear:

Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice”. For I came not to call the righteous but sinners. *Matthew 9. 12-13*

Jesus did not come to set an upright example for pious, religious people to follow. He came, primarily, to save all who turn to him from their sins and to make it possible for them to receive the Holy Spirit so that they might have power to live genuinely holy lives. Here it is obvious how effectively an argument against the Bible can be turned into a very good opportunity for witness. Whenever a Muslim challenges the Bible on a point such as this it is essential that we look not only for ways of refuting the objection but also for openings to share what our faith is really all about.

## 1.11 Biblical “Pornography” and Obscenities

**Muslim:** *How can a book which is supposed to be God’s Holy Word have stories about Judah’s incest, David’s adultery, Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute as well as passages where God speaks in terms that are clearly obscene and pornographic?*

This line of argument has become increasingly common in recent times. It derives from a Muslim assumption that all the prophets were sinless and that God would never use blunt language to describe the infidelity of his people or, to put it another way, to “call a spade a spade”. Let us begin with the first part of the argument.

### The Supposed Sinlessness of the Prophets

The Bible records many stories of moral failure on the part of the prophets and patriarchs of ancient times. **Judah** committed incest with his daughter Tamar (*Genesis 38.12-26*) just as **Lot** had done with both of his daughters some time before (*Genesis 19.30-38*). **David** committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite (*2 Samuel 11.2-5*) and subsequently arranged to have her husband deliberately killed in the forefront of battle (*2 Samuel 11.14-21*). Other prophets sinned in different ways - **Moses** murdered an Egyptian, **Jacob** lied to his father Isaac, and **Solomon** took wives and concubines from the Egyptians and other Gentile nations. Muslims recoil at such stories as they have been taught that all the prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, were sinless. This teaching, known as the doctrine of isma (“sinlessness”), is not founded on the Qur’an but is derived from orthodox Muslim creeds such as the *Fiqh Akbar II* of later centuries. It was established to counter the Christian teaching that Jesus alone was without sin.

When Muslims raise this argument Christians need to point out that the Qur’an teaches that the prophets also committed sins. Many of them in the Qur’an are recorded as praying for the forgiveness of their sins or were commanded to do so. For example:

**1. Abraham** He said of God, the *Rabb’al-Alamin* (“Lord of the Worlds”) that he was the one “who, I hope, will forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgment” (*Surah 26.81*).

Muslim writers try to dilute statements like these, saying he was only praying for protection from mistakes and faults, but the words used here are *yaghfira*, which is the standard Arabic word for “to forgive”, and *khati’ati*, a strong word plainly meaning “sins” and never mistakes or minor errors. It is so used in another passage which states that the people of Noah’s time were drowned “because of their sins” (*Surah 71.25*).

**2. Moses** The Qur’an confirms that Moses killed one of his enemies but immediately thereafter prayed “O my Lord! I have wronged my soul, so forgive me!” (*Surah 28.15-16*). Allah duly did so because he is *Al-Ghafur*, the “Forgiving One”.

**3. David** The story of his adultery is not repeated in the Qur’an but the challenge of Nathan to him afterwards (*2 Samuel 12.1-15*) is in a somewhat varied form. The parable of the man with many flocks and herds who deprived a poor man of his one ewe lamb, used by Nathan to expose David’s wickedness in taking Uriah’s only wife from him while he had many wives of his own, is repeated in a short passage in the Qur’an (*Surah 38.21-25*). It concludes with a statement that David “asked forgiveness” (*fastaghfara*) and that Allah duly forgave him (*faghafar*), the standard word for forgiveness of sin again being used. Muslim writers use all manner of arguments to avoid the implications of such passages, denying that the parable relates to David’s adultery, but not being able to provide an alternative explanation for it (as the Qur’an does not place it in a context as the Bible does). Very significantly, however, Allah then commands David not to “follow your own lust” as others do who will face a grievous punishment (*Surah 38.26*) on the Day of Reckoning (*Yawma’l-Hisab*).

**4. Muhammad** The Prophet of Islam himself is ordered to “ask forgiveness of your sins” as well as for those of all believing men and women (*Surah 47.19*), the words used here being *wastaghfir lithanbik*



which are exactly the same words used when Zulaykah (the Muslim name for Potiphar's wife) is commanded to repent of her desire to seduce Joseph (*Surah 12.29*).

The Bible quite simply does not gloss over the faults of the prophets and its fundamental opinion of all men is that none of them is righteous, that all have gone astray, have sinned against God and turned aside to their own ways (*Romans 3.9-18*). For this reason Jesus Christ came into the world, the only sinless man who ever lived, so that all might be saved. Once again there is an obvious opportunity here for witness and it is important to point out to Muslims that the Qur'an is much closer to the Bible than they are when it freely concedes the sins of the prophets.

## Alleged Pornographic Passages in the Bible

The second part of the argument presented here is based on passages like the following which certain Muslim writers claim contains obscene and pornographic language:

She did not give up her harlotry which she had practised since her days in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust upon her. Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians upon whom she doted. These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and her they slew with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed upon her.

*Ezekiel 23.8-10*

The whole chapter is cited as an example of impure language which, it is claimed, is unbecoming of a holy God to use. Another typical passage to which exception is taken is the following:

Plead with your mother, plead - for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband - that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born.

*Hosea 2.2-3*

Both of these passages are illustrative of the extreme anger of God at the unfaithfulness of his people, Israel, towards him. This is why he told Hosea to take a prostitute as his wife because it would symbolise how God felt about his own people. They were constantly turning away from him to false gods and idols and adopted the lewd practices of the nations around them instead of submitting to his holiness.

The language God uses in these passages is designed to shock his people into an awareness and consciousness of how defiled they are in his sight. Their behaviour toward him is like that of an adulterous wife who freely gives herself up to other lovers. It required strong, emphatic language to make them realise the ugliness of their foolish ways. On the Day of Judgment God will declare all filthy practices to be precisely what they are - sodomy, sexual perversion, prostitution, lewdness and the like. He will not use nice terms to describe immoral behaviour as some Muslims seem to think he should if he is to be God. He has seen all the perverse passions of the human race and nothing shocks him. He will deal with them for what they are.

Muslims must be encouraged to let God be who he is and to speak as he wishes. No one on earth can prescribe to him how he should describe unfaithfulness and infidelity. When a Muslim tells you that such language in the Bible encourages young people to think impure thoughts and creates all sorts of lustful desires you need only to quote the following verse in reply to them:

To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted.

*Titus 1.15*

Such impurity is only in the mind of the reader, not in the scripture. It is amazing to hear the Bible - a book which has turned millions away from perverse practices - described as pornographic or obscene. It is Christians, people who believe in the book, who have always been at the forefront of campaigns to ban real pornographic literature.

Once again you have here an opportunity to make an impact on Muslims. When they raise such passages ask them if they have read the whole Bible through from cover to cover. Encourage them to do so - and to desist from paying attention only to passages which have to be wrenched totally out of context to be made to appear "obscene" or "pornographic".

## The Qur'an in Relation to the Bible

### 1.12 The Jewish and Christian Scriptures

**Muslim:** *The Qur'an itself confirms that the Bible has been changed. The Old and New Testaments not the books that were revealed originally to Moses and Jesus. Where are those books today? What you have in your hands is no longer the Word of God.*

Throughout the world Muslims are taught that the Qur'an accuses the Jews and Christians of having tampered with their scriptures. The charge that the Bible has been changed is one of the greatest falsehoods ever proclaimed in the cause of truth as we have seen already. Yet what is most interesting is to find that the Qur'an, in contrast with the general Muslim attitude, actually speaks very highly of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and positively confirms their authenticity.

### The Tawraat: The Jewish Scripture

The common title for the whole Jewish scripture in the Qur'an is at-Tawraat, "the Law". It is said to be specifically the kitab (book) which was given to Moses (*Surah 11.110*). Its integrity and existence in the hands of the Jews at the time of Muhammad is confirmed in this verse:

How will they make you their judge seeing they have the Tawraat, wherein is Allah's judgment, then afterwards turn their backs.  
*Surah 5.46*

This passage quite plainly teaches that **the Jews** (specifically named as the people being referred to in *Surah 5.44*) actually have the Tawraat. The words used in the original Arabic text confirm this. The book is said to be *inda hum* - "with them". It is quite clear that the Qur'an, in this verse, teaches that the book was in their possession at the time of Muhammad. As the verse speaks of Jews who were actually coming to him for judicial decisions it is obvious that it speaks of Jews who were in the environment of Medina. The passage goes on to describe the *Tawraat* as a "guidance and light" which the former prophets used to apply the law of God to the Jews, their rabbis and judges (*Surah 5.47*). Further appeals are made to judge by what has been revealed therein.

Throughout their history **the Jews** of the world have known only one scripture - the books of the **Old Testament** as we know them today. We have already seen that as far back as the second century before Christ (*eight* centuries before Muhammad's time) the Hebrew Old Testament had already been translated into Greek in what is known as the Septuagint. The New Testament scriptures quote from the Old Testament books at length and our earliest extant manuscripts also date centuries before Islam. There can be no doubt, then, that the scripture to which the Qur'an refers can only be the Old Testament.

The Qur'an always speaks of the former scriptures with great reverence. It would hardly exhort the Jews to judge by them if they were corrupted and unreliable. Significantly it uses the very word, *Tawraat* (Torah), which the Jews themselves use to describe the first five books of Moses in the Bible.

### The Injil: The Christian Scripture

The Qur'an once again, when describing the Christian scripture, uses a word with which Christians are very familiar. It calls it *al-Injil*, "the Gospel", and says it was revealed to Jesus:

And following them we sent Jesus the son of Mary confirming what came before him in the Tawraat, and we gave him the *Injil* in which are guidance and light and confirming what came before him in the *Tawraat*.  
*Surah 5.49*

From this text and other similar passages (*Surah 3.3*) it is clear that the Qur'an regards the Tawraat and Injil as the sum total of the Jewish and Christian scriptures respectively. Once again we find the Qur'an confirming the existence of the second scripture in the hands of the Christians at Muhammad's time:

Let the people of the *Injil* judge by what Allah has revealed therein.  
*Surah 5.50*

If the book was not intact in their hands, how could the Qur'an exhort the Christians to make their judgments by its guidance and light? It is significant that this text calls the Christians *ahlul-Injil*, the "People of the Gospel" - a further confirmation of the existence of the book in their hands at the time of Muhammad. Yet, as with the Jews, **the Christians** have known only one scripture throughout their history - the books of the **New Testament** as we know it today. In another passage the Qur'an again confirms that the two scriptures were in the possession of the Jews and Christians during Muhammad's days:

Those who follow the messenger, the unlettered prophet, will find him mentioned in the Tawraat and Injil with them. *Surah 7.157*

Again the Qur'an states that these scriptures are *inda hum*, Arabic words meaning very specifically "with them". It is obvious that Muhammad never doubted the integrity of the books which the Jews and Christians of his day regarded as their holy scripture. He had no reservations about confirming their integrity. Another passage from the Qur'an emphasises this fact very clearly:

Say, O People of the Scripture. You have no ground to stand on unless you stand fast by the *Tawraat* and the *Injil* and what has been sent down to you from your Lord.  
*Surah 5.71*

How could they stand fast by these scriptures if, firstly, they did not possess them and, secondly, if they were not completely authentic? It is undeniable that the Qur'an teaches that the Jewish and Christian scriptures were



## 2. The Spoken Word of Allah

In this verse the Qur'an expressly states that it was the *kalam* of Allah that was being perverted. This is the **spoken** word which they "heard" as the verse clearly states. It was not the *kitab*, the **written book**, that was being changed. When referring to the Jewish and the Christian scriptures the Qur'an always refers to them as the *kitab* of Allah. Here it is solely a preached message that is in issue.

## 3. The Word is the Word Preached by Muhammad

It is obvious that it was the preaching of the *Qur'an* that was being misrepresented. A group of people who had heard it preached by Muhammad are said to have perverted it afterwards - how, then, could he hope that they would believe him? It requires a fair stretch of the imagination to turn this into a proof of a corruption of the written text of the Bible!

## 4. Only a Party of His Hearers Perverted It

It is obviously only a group of Jews from Muhammad's own time who are being charged with misrepresenting his message. The very next verse accuses them of claiming to believe when they meet with Muslims only to privately work out afterwards how to twist the message. Once again it is obvious that this verse does not even remotely deal with any supposed corruption of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

## Verbally Twisting the Word of God

Another very similar passage used by Muslim writers as a proof that the Bible has been changed according to the Qur'an but which deals solely with verbal distortions is this one:

There is a party of them who twist the Book with their tongues to make you think it is part of the Book, while it is not from the Book, and they say it is from Allah when it is not from Allah, and they consciously lie against Allah. *Surah 3.78*

It is quite obvious, once again, that the charge is not one of actually corrupting the text of the Bible. The word used to describe what has taken place are *yaluwnal-sinatahum* meaning very simply "tongue twisting". The use of the Arabic word *lisan* (tongue) shows clearly that it is only a **verbal** misrepresentation that is in issue. The issue is purely one of quoting non-Biblical passages as if they were in fact part of the Bible.

## Other Passages Relating to the Charge of Tahrif

There are a few other texts Muslims use to further their arguments against the integrity of the Bible. One which they think really supports their cause is this one:

Then woe to those who write the scripture with their own hands and then say: "This is from Allah" to sell it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands write! And woe for what they gain thereby!  
*Surah 2.79*

This time there is a clear statement about actually **writing** a text purporting to be scripture for resale and profit. It is only small portions of passages compiled by an unnamed group of people that is referred to, however, and yet again there is no charge that the Bible itself was being changed. The original *Tawraat* and *Injil* are always spoken of with great reverence and there is not a hint here that these books themselves were being altered. It is *other* writings that are mentioned. Furthermore the text is too vague, like many of the others, to determine exactly what is being dealt with here. There is no statement as to *what* was being written, *who* was actually doing it or precisely *when* it occurred.

The last verse we need to consider which is often quoted by Muslims to show that the Qur'an teaches that the Bible has been changed is this one:

O People of the Book! Why do clothe the truth with falsehood and conceal the truth when you know otherwise? *Surah 3.71*

Yet again, however, it is a general charge of misrepresentation of the truth and in no way can be said to teach that the Bible itself has been changed. The actual scriptures of the Jews and Christians are not even mentioned. It is no wonder that early Muslim scholars only claimed that the Qur'an taught that the *tahrif* of which it speaks was solely of the meaning and teaching of the scriptures, never of the text itself. Muslims who claim otherwise are consciously "clothing the truth with falsehood" themselves and it is perhaps they who "conceal the truth" when they likewise know otherwise!

## 1.14 The Tawraat, Injil and Qur'an

**Muslim:** *The Bible you have today is not the original Tawraat and Injil which were revealed to Moses and Jesus respectively. You have the books of Paul and other writers but not the Word of God. Where are the original Tawraat and Injil?*



to God or not? Can it be justified in any way?" The answer has always been "No", to which I have responded "Then why don't you, upon waking tomorrow morning, pledge to God that you will never sin again for the rest of your life?" The response to that has never been quite so emphatic! Muslims know sin dwells deep within them no matter how much Islam may teach them it is only a choice to do a wrong deed as opposed to an equal choice to do right instead. Much can be achieved by showing them that, although sinful man cannot reach up to God, in his kindness and mercy God reached down to us in his Son Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. *John 3.16*

That is the Gospel, that is what the expression *Injil* means. So likewise the very name *Jesus* means "God is our Saviour" (*cf. Matthew 1.15*). Let the Muslim know precisely what the Good News (the meaning of "Gospel") of God's salvation really is. Whenever a Muslim questions you as to the whereabouts of the original *Injil*, tell him it is everywhere! When he asks you to produce it, share the good news of the true Gospel with him. Ask him in return what the Arabic expression means and why it is always used in conjunction with the person of Jesus in Islam. Once again be aware of how Muslim arguments can be transformed into wonderful opportunities to witness effectively to them.

## 1.15 The Old and New Testaments in the Bible

**Muslim:** *No matter what you say we are satisfied that the Old and New Testaments are not the true Word of God. At some time in the centuries before Islam they must have been corrupted. Muslims have always unanimously held this view.*

There are a few points in conclusion that Christians should master to counter the Muslim arguments against the integrity of the Bible.

### Prophecies to Jesus in the Old Testament

Although the Old Testament is the Jewish Scripture and was completed some centuries before Jesus Christ came to earth, it contains numerous prophecies to Jesus, especially the following two essential features of Christian belief and New Testament teaching:

## 1. The Deity of Jesus Christ

This is foretold in 1 Chronicles 17.13, Psalm 2.7, Psalm 89.26-27, Isaiah 9.6 and many other passages of the Old Testament. The Jews could never have allowed the Christians to interpolate such teachings into their holy scripture.

## 2. The Crucifixion and Atonement

The actual event of the crucifixion of Jesus is clearly foretold in Psalm 22.1-21 and Psalm 69.1-29 while the atonement is also set out in Isaiah 52.13 - 53.12 as well as in other Old Testament passages. This is once again a strong testimony to the integrity of the book for the Jews would surely have replaced these texts first if they had corrupted their scripture at any time.

## Who Corrupted the Former Scriptures?

The Muslims have never been able to produce so much as an iota of historical evidence to show who actually corrupted the scriptures and when this took place. It needs to be remembered that the Christian world has freely accepted the Old Testament of the Jews as the unchanged Word of God together with the New Testament. We do not believe that God ever allowed *any* portion of his Word to be changed. *All* of it has been preserved intact, not just one portion of it as Muslims believe.

As we have seen the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek was done two centuries before the time of Jesus Christ. It is completely consistent with the oldest Hebrew texts and there can be no doubt that the Old Testament today is the scripture held sacred by the Jews before the times of both Jesus and Muhammad. Yet this same book contains prophecies of both the divinity and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the two New Testament teachings that the Qur'an so strongly denies.

Judaism and Christianity are very different, at times strongly opposing religions. Both religions have had their own internal divisions. Are we to seriously believe that, at some unknown point in history, they all came together to change their scriptures by complete agreement? Such an event could hardly have gone undocumented, let alone the possibility of such an improbable conspiracy. Had representatives of even one of the two major religions decided unanimously to pervert the Old Testament, they could never have persuaded the other to do likewise. There is quite simply no logic, evidence or reason in the Muslim contention that the Bible has been changed. It is one of the great illusions of history.

## Early Muslim Scholars and the Bible

It is very significant that, in the early centuries of Islam, the authenticity of the Old and New Testaments was freely acknowledged and their identity as the *Tawraat* and *Injil* of the Qur'an was never disputed. Even though the Bible did not take the form of the Qur'an Muslim scholars accepted it, partly because they knew the Jews and Christians had known no other scripture and partly because the book is an awesome record of God's dealings with his people from Adam to Jesus Christ. After all, if the Bible does not contain the original books, where did it come from? Why would the Jews and the Christians over so many centuries forge a book of such holy teachings in defiance of the very books of God if they had them in their hands?

The attitudes of some of the great Muslim scholars of the earlier centuries of Islam can be contrasted with the prejudicial arguments set forth in modern Muslim publications.

### 1. Ali Tabari

He was a well-known physician at the court of the Abbasid Caliph Mutawakkil about two hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death and wrote a defence of the Prophet of Islam including a study of numerous Biblical prophecies which he believed all referred to him. He freely taught that the first book which came into existence was the *Tawraat* of the Jews and that it was in their possession. He taught the same about the *Injil* which he likewise conceded was in the hands of the Christians. When speaking of their contents, however, he outlined the contents of the Old and New Testaments respectively.

### 2. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali

He is one of the most original thinkers the Muslim world has ever known and is generally regarded as its greatest theologian. He wrote a long exposition on the Trinity and, although he lived some five centuries after Muhammad when other radical scholars such as Ibn Hazm were attacking the integrity of the Bible text, he also freely accepted its authenticity. He argued only that the Christians had misinterpreted their scriptures. He died in the year 1111 AD.

### 3. Fakhruddin Razi

Another great and famous theologian, he lived a hundred years after al-Ghazzali and died in 1209 AD. He was quite emphatic about the

Biblical text - that it had not been changed and that the teaching and narratives of the Qur'an were perfectly consistent with those of the Bible.

These great scholars only perpetuated the position the Qur'an itself takes on the former scriptures - that they are the authentic Word of God and have not been changed. It is important for Christians to know these facts in response to the relentless challenge one experiences these days from Muslim writers who do all they can to undermine the genuineness of the Bible.

# Chapter Two

## The Doctrine of the Trinity The Christian Doctrine of God

### 2.1 Biblical Origins of the Trinitarian Doctrine

**Muslim:** *The Bible nowhere teaches that God is a Trinity. The word “trinity” does not appear in the book. Jews believed in one God while Greeks and Romans believed in many gods. The Church invented the three gods in one theory to placate them both.*

The doctrine of the **Trinity** is one of the great divisive issues between Christians and Muslims. The latter believe it strikes at the very heart of God’s absolute oneness which is one of the fundamental themes of the Qur’an. Muslims believe that any attempt to attribute partners to Allah is *shirk* (“associating”), the greatest of all sins and the only one which cannot be forgiven:

Truly Allah will not forgive any associating with him but will forgive anything else to whomever he pleases. For whoever associates (*shirk*) with Allah verily commits a great sin. *Surah 4.48*

The Christian doctrine is viewed as precisely that - an association of Jesus with God together with the Holy Spirit. For Allah to beget a Son is presumed by Muslims to be the ultimate expression of unbelief. From childhood all Muslims are taught this particular Surah by heart, already quoted in this book, and regarded as one of the greatest in the Qur’an, indeed as equivalent to one-third of the whole book:

Say, He is Allah, the One, Allah the Eternal One. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and like unto him there is not one. *Surah 112.1-4*



In witness with Muslims you will soon find that, on the one hand, Muslims will strenuously deny any possibility of God being Triune while, on the other, they will vociferously attack the doctrine which they presume to be the weakest point of Christian belief. After all, how can three persons exist in one God? When Christ died, did God die? Did all three persons expire on the cross? They must have if they were one, Muslims will argue. They will also, as the argument cited above does, claim in any event that the Trinity is not found in the Bible. Let us begin by examining clear proofs that the doctrine is firmly founded on the Bible.

## The Deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

With Muslims it is necessary to emphasize the nature of the Triune God as he is revealed in the Bible - **Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. Let us consider each one in turn.

### 1. God the Father

This is the commonest name for God in the New Testament - *the Father* - although it is rarely found as a description for God in any other religion and never in Islam. Jesus always spoke of God in heaven as “my Father” (*Matthew 18.11*), “your Father” (*Luke 12.32*), “the Father” (*John 14.12*) and when praying simply addressed him as “Father” (*John 11.41*). The important point here is that God is spoken of in **relational** terms. He is not just the sovereign ruler of the universe, he has a definite relationship within his divine being beyond his own individual personality.

### 2. God the Son

It is with a second personality - *the Son* - that he enjoys his primary relationship. This second person became the man **Jesus Christ**. He always spoke of himself as the Son of the Father in absolute and exclusive terms. No one knows the Son but the Father and no one knows the Father but the Son (*Matthew 11.27*). Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him (*John 4.23*). He came from the Father into the world, he was to leave it and return to the Father (*John 16.28*). It is important, when discussing the Trinity with Muslims, to emphasize such texts to show the divine relationship between the Father and the Son which no other human being enjoys on such exclusive terms.

### 3. God the Holy Spirit

Throughout the New Testament a third personality constantly appears - *the Holy Spirit* - and he enjoys an obviously intimate relationship with both the Father and the Son at their divine level. He would be sent by the Son from the Father, he proceeds from the Father, and he bears witness to the Son (*John 15.26*). The Father would send him in the Son’s name and he would bring to remembrance all that the Son had taught his disciples (*John 14.26*).

All these quotations are from Jesus Christ himself, the great Word of the Father who was in the beginning, was with God, and is God (*John 1.1*). He is constantly called the Son of God in the Bible, by no less than the Father himself who twice spoke from heaven and declared “This is my beloved Son” (*Matthew 4.17, 17.5*).

## Biblical Trinitarian Statements

There are a number of statements in the Bible which speak of all three persons of the Trinity in one breath. We will consider three that can effectively be quoted in discussion with Muslims on this subject.

### 1. Matthew 28.19: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit

In this passage Jesus Christ himself commands his disciples to make further disciples throughout the world, “baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. It is very significant that Jesus spoke of the **name** of all three, using the singular to denote an absolute unity between them. Likewise the word “name” in the Bible is often used to define something about a person, for example *Mosheh* (Moses) who was so-called because he was drawn out (mashah) of the water. In *Matthew 28.19* Jesus used the word to express the common nature of the three persons, saying in effect “baptising them into the *one essence* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

### 2. 2 Corinthians 13.14: The Triune blessing

Paul concludes this letter by commending the Corinthian Christians to the *grace* of the Son, the *love* of the Father and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit. Once again each person of the Trinity is cited in union with the other two and it is a benediction and communion of overall divine goodwill which is commended to them.

### 3. Ephesians 2.18. Access to the Eternal Father

Paul again mentions all three persons of the Trinity together in a statement of common purpose and divine union. In Jesus Christ the Son both Jewish and Gentile believers have access through the same Holy Spirit to the Father. Once again the *unity* between the three persons cannot be missed and the emphasis, yet again, on the *divine realm* in which they relate to each other. In Matthew 28.19 it is a common divine nature, in 2 Corinthians 13.14 a common divine blessing, and here a common divine accessibility that are presented to the reader.

There are numerous other proofs of the Trinity throughout the Bible. Even in the **Old Testament** the second person is often mentioned as the Son to the Father as we have seen in the last chapter while the Holy Spirit is often spoken of as God's direct agent and his own spirit (Genesis 1.2, Psalm 51.11). It is essential, in witness with Muslims, to show that the Church did not invent the Trinity or adapt its belief about God to prevailing monotheistic or polytheistic beliefs, but obtained it directly from the teaching of its original scripture, the Bible.

It is also useful to point out that it was the coming of **Jesus Christ** into the world that opened up the revelation of God as a triune being. Before him the Old Testament generally spoke of God as *Yahweh*, the Lord God of Israel, but when Jesus began to teach he frequently spoke of God as the Father, himself as the Son and of the coming of the Holy Spirit in such terms as to leave no doubt that all three shared the realm of the divine glory, that they shared a common nature, essence and purpose, and that there was an absolute unity between them. The New Testament, in consequence, focuses consistently on each of the three persons in the divine Trinity as the sphere in which Christian believers can come to know God (the Father), be forgiven by him (through his Son Jesus Christ) and enjoy his divine presence (in the Holy Spirit). All references to *Yahweh* disappear in the light of the intimate unity which all believers enjoy with God now more fully revealed in his true nature and triune personality.

## 2.2 The Incomprehensible Nature of God

**Muslim:** *The concept of God is very easy to understand in Islam but your Christian doctrine of the Trinity defies reason. Even if you were to write a thousand books you could never fully explain it. Yet our doctrine can easily be placed on a postage stamp: Huwallaahu ahad - He is Allah the One.*

Muslims sincerely find it very hard to understand how God can be triune and, in explaining the doctrine, Christians are often likely to confuse

themselves as much as the Muslims! It is not a simple concept as we should freely concede. Nonetheless its complexity is not an argument against its tenability, if anything it is the strongest point in its favour. After all, we are dealing with the nature of the eternal God of the Universe. He is greater than the heavens and the earth - would it be surprising to us, who are merely mortal, finite creatures, to find that his basic character is incomprehensible? As the Bible itself says:

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven - what can you do? Deeper than Sheol - what can you know?  
*Job 11.7-8*

Muslims claim that Islam's concept of God can very easily be comprehended and is therefore more acceptable than what Christians admit is an incomprehensible doctrine. One cannot help asking whether a concept of God that can easily be understood in the human mind was not perhaps conceived there in the first place. As Kenneth Cragg has said, a doctrine of God does not commend itself by its ability to be reduced to a statement on a postage stamp. We are not dealing with simplicity here. The Muslim writer Afif Tabbarah is more to the point when he says that the Almighty God is much dissimilar to his creatures and more sublime than simple minds can imagine.

## Searching Out the Knowledge of God

The doctrine of the Trinity is not contrary to reason. Quite simply it is above the realms of finite human reasoning. It requires a different approach to come to terms with it. A rational, analytic study of its tenets will yield little of substance. The Apostle Paul once said:

Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?  
*Acts 26.8*

Paul, addressing King Agrippa and other members of his court, made no attempt to rationally explain how the dead can be raised back to life. All scientific studies of the world of nature will never be able to give a rational explanation of how this can be possible. The issue here is one of **faith**. All Muslims, on faith alone, will concede the resurrection of the dead to life. Why then, we may ask, is it thought incredible by any of them that the Almighty God who rules this universe is incomprehensible in his infinite and eternal nature?

The New Testament is far more concerned about our **relationship** with God than our understanding of his nature. What we know *about* God is not nearly as important as the need to actually *know* God. The pursuit of his

holiness, the forgiveness of our sins and the assurance of eternal life are the concerns of the Christian scriptures. As Paul says, we have come to know God or, rather, to be *known of* God (*Galatians 4.9*). It is through the **revelation** of God in his eternal triune nature, especially as revealed to us in Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God (*Colossians 1.15*) in whom the whole fulness of God dwelt bodily (*Colossians 2.9*), that we have come to **know** God and to be **known of** him. Muslims need to be told that what is most important is that we should be right with God, approved of him, loved and forgiven, rather than that we should be able to understand or comprehend his nature. God wants to be loved and obeyed, not studied or analysed.

## The Trinity: A Divine Revelation

It is important also to point out to Muslims that although the mainline Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches have differed on many subjects, *they have never even remotely argued over the doctrine of the Trinity including its finer details*. The reason is simply that the Church never created this doctrine, it **discerned** it from a study of the revelation of God in the holy scriptures. It is the only doctrine of God that can be formulated from an objective study of the books of the New Testament.

The **Council of Nicaea** in 325 AD finally defined the Trinitarian doctrine. The term Trinity was first proposed by Tertullian, the great early African Christian scholar. Muslims often fasten on this as a proof that the doctrine is an invention of the Church some centuries after Christ. Crudely put, some Muslims argue that God had always been a unitarian being until the third century when the Church turned him into a Trinity. I can suggest a very useful line of argument that I have found to be very effective in getting past this objection.

For centuries all mankind believed that the earth was flat and that the sun, planets and stars revolved around it. A few centuries ago Galileo, Copernicus and other astronomers began proclaiming that in fact the earth is round, is suspended in space, and is revolving around the sun. The theory was denounced (most prominently by the Church!) for the simple reason that throughout history it was common knowledge that the earth was flat and, in any event, common sense could tell anyone that this planet was not moving and that the sky was rotating around us. The idea that we are circling at more than one thousand miles an hour on our own axis daily, are revolving around the sun at tens of thousands of miles an hour, and are spinning through the universe at even phenomenally greater speeds, was to the minds of people of those days entirely irrational. It is only because we have scientific proof that we accept the

theory today but it is still very hard to comprehend. God's nature, however, cannot be scientifically proved. He may, however, turn out to be very opposite to what people naturally would expect just as the planetary system has done. Yet the Church discerned the Triune nature of God some fourteen centuries before the truth about our universe was discovered. Why? Simply because God **revealed** his true nature to us in the scriptures. The Church did not turn God into a Trinity - he was so from all eternity.

Some Muslims argue that the Trinity cannot be mathematically proved. After all,  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ , they argue. There is no way they can be made to be one. Yet even mathematics uses an independent symbol,  $\infty$ , to define infinity, simply because it cannot be multiplied, divided, added to or subtracted from by ordinary numerals. So too the infinite God cannot be comprehended in finite terms and our mathematics are a quite inadequate standard for determining eternal realities!

Christianity makes no attempt to present a **comprehensible** God to the world. Its aim is to reveal a **knowable** God - the Father who loves his own children, the Son who died to redeem them, and the Holy Spirit who renews and sanctifies them. Man's goal is to get to heaven and to be with God - not to be able to plot heaven on a map or produce a concept of God that can be easily comprehended, analysed or reduced to a statement on a postage stamp.

## 2.3 The Unity of God: The Basis of the Trinity

**Muslim:** *The truth is that Christians in fact worship three gods and are guilty of shirk. The Bible emphasises the fact that God is one God. Your doctrine is inconsistent with your own scripture. You cannot put three personalities into one God.*

It is intriguing to find Muslims arguing that the Bible emphatically teaches that God is one as if this undermined the Trinity doctrine. The Old Testament declares that "the Lord is God on heaven above and on earth beneath - there is no other" (*Deuteronomy 4.39*) while the New Testament likewise states "The Lord our God is one Lord" (*Mark 12.29*) and that "God is one" (*Romans 3.30, Galatians 3.20*). It is useful in conversation with Muslims on the Trinity, nevertheless, to quote these texts to establish the point from the outset that the unity of God is as much a fundamental teaching of the whole Bible as it is in the Qur'an. The issue is the *complex nature* of this unity in the Biblical doctrine of the Triune God.

## God: A Tri-Unity, not a Tritheism

How can three be one, the Muslim fairly asks? All human beings are distinct creatures and personalities. In no way can three of them become one being with one single nature. Our answer to this has to be to go to the Bible and see how it projects the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### 1. 1 John 1.5: God is Light

The Bible focuses on this theme often. God is called the “Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (*James 1.17*). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, also declared “I am the **light** of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (*John 8.12*) while the New Testament also says of him that he likewise will never change, being the same yesterday, today and forever (*Hebrews 13.8*). Through the Holy Spirit, furthermore, God shines into our hearts to give “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (*2 Corinthians 4.6*). There is clearly an absolute unity of essence and purpose between them.

### 2. John 3.33: God is True

Just as this text declares Truth to be an essential essence of God the Father, so the Son of God could declare “I *am* the Truth” (*John 14.6*). Likewise the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Truth” (*John 15.26*). There is no falsehood in any of them. Once again one discovers that, while human beings may differ in personality and character, there are no such differences between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are the Truth.

### 3. 1 John 4.8: God is Love

The New Testament often speaks of the love of the Father (*John 16.27*) but goes on to say that the love of God was made manifest in the fact that he sent his Son to redeem us from our sins (*Romans 5.8, 1 John 4.10*). Likewise it states that God’s love has been “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (*Romans 5.5*). Again we have an absolute unity in essence and purpose between the three persons of the Trinity.

Much the same can be said of the **life** of God. As the Father is the source of all life, so the Son called himself “the Life” (*John 11.25, 15.6*) and is

called the Author of Life (*Acts 3.15*). The Holy Spirit is likewise the one through whom God will give eternal life to our mortal bodies (*Romans 8.11*). In all these texts we can see a divine **tri-unity**, not three independent personalities. Our doctrine is only held within a definition of God’s unity. Without it the Trinity’s fundamental nature falls away. You quite simply cannot establish the doctrine outside of God’s essential oneness. As Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (*John 10.30*) and this total unity is shared with the Holy Spirit.

## Early Muslim Reactions to the Trinity

It is very interesting to see how early Muslim writers responded to the doctrine of the Trinity. The most important and exhaustive work was a dissertation in the ninth century after Christ by **Abu Isa al-Warraaq** which he titled *Ar-Radd ala al-Tathlith* (“The Refutation of the Trinity”).

Abu Isa wrote purely in response to the Christian theorists of his day. They taught the tri-unity of God in a very technical manner and focused on the Son as the Word and the Spirit as the Life - a poor distinction as Jesus Christ so often spoke of himself as “the Life” as we have seen. Just as modern Christians often use illustrations to define the Trinity (such as the one egg with three parts, its shell, yolk and white), so the Christians of those days also used what in my mind was an inadequate (and often misleading) approach. They tried, from reason, to prove that three separate hypostases could be one being.

Abu Isa responded in kind. He followed the principle first stated by the Muslim scholar **Al-Kindi**, namely that God is a being who is neither multiple or divisible in any way, not by his essence nor by something other than it, and one whose substance likewise cannot be divided or multiplied in any way. While most Muslim writers usually attacked the Christian doctrine from a Qur’anic standpoint, namely that Allah could not have a Son, has no partners, and that Jesus was only a messenger, Abu Isa took the doctrine at face value. He made himself well acquainted with it.

He argued that if the hypostases are the substance, and the substance is one and undifferentiated while the hypostases are three, then the Christians have made what is differentiated not differentiated. Again, he argued, if the substance is identical to the hypostases, the one must be the other. There cannot be three of one and one of the other. If they are distinct, the substance is a fourth.

Abu Isa based his arguments on the popular rational theories of his day, one of which was that human **reason** is always the sole criterion of judgment and that prophets must speak within its dictates. You can see what happens when Christians try to prove the Trinity by analytical reasoning and on



and it would never have been discovered had it not been revealed to us in the pages of the New Testament. It originated in a dominantly monotheistic Jewish world and represents a deity entirely consistent with the God of Israel of the Old Testament.

When Muslims argue a pagan origin for the Trinity the Christian has a great opportunity to witness very effectively to the glory of God and his great work of salvation for us. The unique feature of our doctrine is its threefold personality of **Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. The New Testament writers themselves made no effort to define the Christian doctrine of God or to codify or explain it. *They simply proclaimed it!* It was left to later generations of Christian scholars to interpret their teachings in a clearly defined doctrine.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and the other New Testament authors were concerned primarily to project the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to Christian believers. The aim was to call forth a response of *faith* from the heart and to strengthen it. As pointed out already, God does not want to be defined, analysed or conceptualised as much as he wants to be *believed, obeyed* and implicitly *trusted*. He cannot be seen, materialised, computerised or reduced to anything that can be finitely determined. He can, however, be **known** and the issue between Christians and Muslims is not so much one of his identity but rather of what we most urgently need to secure, namely to be forgiven by him, to receive his Spirit, to personally know him, to become his children and to eventually inherit his kingdom.

In the next section we will look at the best ways of canvassing the Trinity with Muslims and will see why it is better to use this subject as an opportunity for witness rather than one to be argued or proved.

## 2.5 The Father, Son and Holy Spirit

**Muslim:** *The Qur'an teaches that man's highest honour is to be a servant of Allah who is our Lord and Master. What is required is that we should obey his laws and believe in the Last Day when we hope he will forgive us our sins.*

To a Muslim God's favour cannot be guaranteed, his forgiveness cannot be assured in this life, and it is not possible to know him or to enter into a personal relationship with him. The Qur'an says:

There is no one in the heavens and the earth who can come to the Compassionate except as a servant. *Surah 19.93*

The word used for servant is *abd* and earlier in the same surah Jesus is recorded as declaring "I am a servant of Allah" (*Surah 19.30*) where the same Arabic word is used. According to Islam this is the highest status of any man before Allah - no more than a servant to his divine Master and Judge. Hence Muslims believe that they need to live purely as servants of God, working to earn his favour and hoping for his good pleasure on their lives when the great Day of Resurrection comes. Here the Christian has a glorious field to proclaim the Trinity in such a way as to set forth a much greater hope and more glorious God.

## The Father: God For Us

According to the Hadith records of Islam Allah has ninety-nine "beautiful names" (*al-asma'ul husna*) which are his attributes. Whoever recites them can expect to enter into Paradise (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1410). The first thirteen occur in order in Surah 59.22-24 and begin as follows: *Ar-Rahman* (The Compassionate), *Ar-Rahim* (The Merciful), *Al-Malik* (The Sovereign), *Al-Quddus* (The Holy), etc. According to Sufi Muslims Allah has a hundredth name which has been revealed only to the great Sufi masters of history.

I have often suggested to Muslims that, if a name is missing from the hundred names of Allah, it is not the hundredth but rather the first, the commonest title for God in the New Testament - **the Father**. It is most significant to find that God is nowhere called Father in the Qur'an or any other work of early Islamic literature. The point is, logically, that if the greatest role men can have towards God is solely to be his servants as the Qur'an teaches, then he can only be their Master (*Al-Malik*). The Qur'an quite simply does not allow for the possibility that we can become children - in fact it states the opposite quite emphatically (*Surah 6.100*).

When Jesus began to preach, however, he consistently taught that God is the Father of all true believers. This title, given to the first person of the Trinity, tells us that **God is for us**. If he has become our Father, then we are no longer just slaves and servants of God but his *children*. It is very useful to compare the roles of a servant and a child with Muslims in conversation. A servant has to earn his keep every day. His master does not necessarily have any affection for him, he only expects him to do his duty. The servant can be dismissed if he does not perform his task properly. He likewise will live outside his master's home in his own quarters. A child, however, knows he is loved by his father and that he will never be dismissed from his father's home. He does not have to earn his place, he has it by right. He lives in his father's home in his own room. He experiences a freedom a servant never has because he knows his father is *for him*. So it is with true Christians who know God's love personally.



does this apply more importantly than to the subject of the Trinity. Do not let Muslims weigh you down with arguments against the logical reasonableness of the doctrine, nor try to make your point through defective three-in-one illustrations. Use the opportunity to show them that the Triune personality of God was only finally revealed when Jesus Christ came to earth and spoke freely of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was only when the time had fully come for God's love to be completely expressed in Christ that the true nature of God's whole being was imparted to us and this is why the New Testament writers focused on this theme and no other when dealing with the Trinity. We will do well to do likewise in our witness to Muslims.

## 2.6 The Qur'an and the Christian Doctrine

**Muslim:** *The Qur'an denies the Trinity expressly. God is only one God -not three as you believe. It is a great blasphemy to say that Allah has any partners. Everything in the heavens and the earth gives glory to him alone.*

The great cause of Muslim misconceptions about the Trinity is the complete misrepresentation of it in the Qur'an. The word "Trinity" also nowhere occurs in this book but it is clear that the Qur'an is out to oppose the Christian belief in a threefold divine existence, no matter what form it may take. Nonetheless it does not even begin to address the basic Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit but reacts to a perversion of it possibly derived from sectarian beliefs in and around the Arabian peninsula.

### The Qur'anic Threesome: Jesus, Mary and Allah

The Qur'an quite emphatically rejects the Christian belief as a triad of deities and names them as **Jesus**, his mother **Mary**, and **Allah** - in that order! In three passages this concept is assailed as polytheistic and blasphemous. The first reads as follows:

And do not say: Three. Desist - it is better for you! Truly Allah is only One. Glorified be he above taking a son to himself. *Surah 4.171*

The word used here for "three" is *thalathah*, a common Qur'anic word appearing nineteen times in the book. It always means "three" and cannot be translated or rendered "Trinity". The command not to speak of Allah as a threesome is contained in a passage exhorting Christians generally not to exaggerate in their religion. By contrasting the oneness of God with the

threefold Christian deity it is clear that the Qur'an is unaware of the essential unity of the Christian doctrine of God.

In another passage the Qur'an actually identifies the three different deities which Christians supposedly worship. Interestingly all three passages which deal with this subject come from the very last portions of the Qur'an to come to Muhammad and it seems that it was only late in his life that he first heard of a Christian divine threesome without ever having the opportunity to discover precisely what the Trinity represents. The second verse on this subject reads:

They speak blasphemy who say that Allah is the third of three. There is indeed no god except the one God. *Surah 5.73*

The words used in the first sentence to express the "third of three" are *thalithu thalathah*. Once again there is no specific reference to the Trinity or any awareness that the Christian God is a Triune being. The distinction, yet again, is purely between *one* and *three* with no allowance for a threefold unity. A few verses later the Qur'an identifies the other two deities in the triad Christians are supposed to worship:

The Messiah son of Mary was only a messenger; messengers before him had passed away. And his mother was upright. They both had to eat food. *Surah 5.75*

The argument is quite clear. **Jesus** and his mother **Mary** were only human beings. Though a messenger of Allah others just like him had preceded him. And his mother was no more than a righteous servant of Allah. After all, they both had to eat food to sustain themselves. So how could they be deities along with Allah? The Qur'an has clearly mistaken the Christian doctrine and represented it as a triad of Jesus, Mary and Allah. It is most significant to find Allah described only as the third of these three. In the Christian doctrine of the Triune God the Father at least has first place!

There were various sects such as the Nestorians, Monophysites and others in the vicinity of Arabia who had confusing beliefs about God, Jesus and Mary but none of them represented the Trinity as consisting of these three. You can see why Muslims think our beliefs are based on the Egyptian Father-Mother-Son family of Osiris, Isis and Horus. What is most probable is that Muhammad was totally unaware of the actual Triune God of the Christian faith and simplistically confused it with pagan beliefs in a Father-Mother-Son triad. If God was indeed the author of the Qur'an it is hard to see how he could make such a mistake and not even remotely represent the Christian doctrine, held to by all the major Christian churches of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and



Orthodox traditions, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one eternal Supreme Being.

The third passage which canvasses the supposed Christian belief in three separate deities is this one:

And when Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to mankind "Take me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?" He will say, Glory to you! I would not have said what I had no right to say. If I had said it, you would have known it. You know what is in my mind though I do not know what is in yours. You are the Knower of the Unseen.  
*Surah 5.116*

Once again the other two deities are said to be Jesus and Mary. The veneration of Mary has been a major article of Roman Catholic belief and the Ethiopian Church, in particular, has historically revered her as the mother of God. It seems, however, that their excesses and confusion have only resulted in the Qur'an compounding the confusion! No Christian Church, no matter how much it reveres or glorifies Mary as, for example, the Queen of Heaven, has ever confused the Trinity or made it out to be what the Qur'an represents it to be.

When Muslims challenge the doctrine of the Trinity and will not allow that it is an expression of divine unity in a different form to the unitarian concept of the Qur'an it is important to raise these texts as evidence, firstly, that the Qur'an misrepresents the doctrine completely and, secondly, that it is the source of the erroneous Muslim conviction that we believe in three separate gods.

It is also important to know that the true Christian doctrine was known in Arabia prior to Muhammad's time. Edward Glasser, an explorer in Yemen, discovered an inscription there in 1888 in a narrative about the revolt against the Ethiopian rule in the country in pre-Islamic times. The inscription dates to 542 AD - twenty eight years before Muhammad's birth - and it reads in Arabic (without vowels which were not written in the Arabic of the time): *Rhmn w mshh w rh qds* - "(In the power of) the Compassionate, and the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit". Thus the true nature of the Christian Trinity was known in the Arabian Peninsula many years before the Qur'an ever came to be written and the book's total misrepresentation of the doctrine can only be ascribed to Muhammad's personal ignorance of Christian theology.

# Chapter Three

## Jesus the Son of the Living God

### The Deity of Jesus Christ in the Bible

#### 3.1 The Qur'anic Rejection of Jesus' Deity

**Muslim:** *The Qur'an is quite emphatic in denying that Jesus is the Son of God. He was only a prophet just like all the other prophets who went before him. If Jesus is the Son of God, who was God's wife? You speak a great blasphemy against Allah.*

What to Christians is the foundation of their belief - that Jesus Christ is God's own Son who alone could redeem us from our sins and take us *into* heaven - is to the Muslims one of the greatest expressions of unbelief and the one which, more than any other, is likely to keep them *out* of heaven. It is crucial to recognise this. In fact the distance between Christians and Muslims on the person of Jesus is the greatest factor driving Christianity and Islam apart. The greatest stumbling-block to bringing Muslims to Christ is the flat rejection of his deity in the Qur'an.

#### Allah has Taken Neither a Wife nor a Son

In the last chapter we saw that the Qur'an misrepresents the Trinity as a family of Allah, Mary and Jesus. On this subject, namely Jesus as **the Son of God**, the Qur'an takes it to mean that Allah must have taken a wife to himself to have a son. It seems Muhammad was unable to consider the title in anything but finite, human terms. The Qur'an says:

Creator of the heavens and the earth! How can he have a son when he has no consort? *Surah 6.101*

And glorious is the majesty of our Lord - he has taken neither a consort nor a son! *Surah 72.3*

It seems that Muhammad understood this doctrine purely in a carnal sense and could not see what Muslims need to know, namely that the *spiritual* relationship between them is the same as that of a father to a son. Three main principles are involved here:

### 1. The Same Essence of Being

Just as fathers and sons on earth are both *human* and have the same essential being, so in heaven the Father and Son are both *divine*. The Son took human form at a point in history and became the man Jesus Christ. The Father never took to himself a Son, they were so from all eternity and will always remain so.

### 2. The Authority of the Father

Although the same in essence, the Father has *authority* over the Son just as on earth sons, though as human as their fathers, submit to their control over their lives. That is why, when on earth, Jesus could assume a relationship of master and servant as well, just as sons in their father’s businesses submit to their rule and lordship.

### 3. His Affection Towards His Son

While a father has authority over his son, he nonetheless will feel a greater affinity with him than he does with any servant and all he has will eventually be passed on to the son. Although the Son could do nothing of his own accord but only what he saw his Father doing (*John 5.19*), nonetheless the Father has a special love for the Son (*John 5.20*) and reveals all his purposes to him, intending one day to delegate his authority to him so that all the earth will honour the Son in the same way it honours the Father (*John 5.22-23*).

This is what the Bible means when it says that Jesus is the Son of God. The issue is *relational* in an eternal, spiritual context. It is not a *carnal*, earthly one as the Qur’an supposes.

## The Great Unpardonable Sin in Islam

To Muhammad the belief in Jesus as the Son of God appeared to be parallel to the pagan Arab belief that many of their idols, such as Al-Lat, al-Uzza and

Manat, were the “daughters of Allah”. Idolatry, *per se*, was to the Prophet of Islam an act of blasphemy, ascribing as it did partners to Allah which was unthinkable and an affront to the very glory of his being. The problem seems to have arisen from the environment Muhammad found himself in. When dealing with the Arab concept, he attacked the contradictory nature of their convictions. They believed, after all, that the birth of a daughter was a cause of grief and shame (*Surah 16.58-59*). How then could they believe that Allah would take only daughters to himself while giving them sons according to their preferences (*Surah 43.16*)! With the Christians, however, he contented himself with simply emphatically denying that Jesus is the Son of God in verses like these:

And the Christians say that the Messiah is the Son of Allah. These are the words from their mouths. They but imitate the sayings of those who disbelieved before. *Qaatalahumullaah* - Allah’s curse be upon them! How they are turned away! *Surah 9.30*

They say Allah has taken a son. Subhaanah - Glory to Him! He is Self-Sufficient! All that is in the heavens and the earth is his! You have no justification for this. How can you say of Allah what you do not know? *Surah 10.68*

These are very strong denunciations. Muhammad thought it compromised the glory of God to say he had a Son whereas, according to the Bible, the revelation of his grace, mercy and kindness in giving his Son to die for us is the greatest proof of his glory! Christians need to emphasise *this* great truth in their witness with Muslims as they are very conscious of the need to honour his glory above all else.

The great tragedy of the denial of Jesus’ deity in the Qur’an is the fact that it is identified with the greatest of all sins in Islam - ascribing partners to Allah. As we have seen in the previous chapter this sin is **unforgivable** in Islam, indeed it is the only unforgivable sin according to the Qur’an (*Surah 4.48*), and will keep a Muslim out of *Jannat al-Firdaus* (the Gardens of Paradise) forever. The Apostle John wrote to the Christians of his day, encouraging them in the knowledge that they had eternal life in believing in the name of the Son of God (*1 John 5.13*). In his Gospel he plainly taught that all who do not believe in his name are already condemned and that only those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God will be saved (*John 3.18*). What to the Christian is the only door to heaven is, to the Muslim, the one sure step into the abyss!

The Qur’an argues that, as Allah has no partners, he cannot have taken to himself a son. In one place it does not seem to teach that it is absolutely impossible for him to have a Son but rather that “it is not *befitting* to him to do so” (*Surah 19.35*). The issue seems to be one of what *glorifies* him and here the



## Jesus: The Eternal Son of God

A Christian, in witness to Muslims, must know at least some of the main evidences that Jesus taught that he was the Son of God in a unique and absolute sense. For example, when he was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin the night of his arrest, after the chief priests could find nothing against him, the High Priest Caiaphas stood up and emphatically asked him “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”. He replied equally unambiguously “I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (*Mark 14.61-62*). The High Priest tore his robes, charging him with blasphemy. His question was not “Are you one of the children of God?”. If it was, the answer could not have occasioned a charge of blasphemy. Everyone knew exactly what the issue was - did he claim to be *the* Son of God, the eternal Son of the Blessed? Jesus’ answer could hardly be misrepresented - he did!

There are numerous passages which make it quite plain why the High Priest believed he was claiming to be the only, eternal Son of God. The following statement is a typical proof:

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.  
*Matthew 11.27*

Likewise, when Jesus said that the Father has given all judgment to the Son so that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father (*John 5.22*), it is impossible to see how such a claim to be the Son of God could have been made in a lesser or metaphorical sense. It is also very useful to quote the two occasions when God himself, speaking from heaven of Jesus, declared “This is my Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (*Matthew 3.17, 17.5*). Nonetheless it is in a parable of Jesus that I have found the most effective proof that he was not just a prophet like those who preceded him but was the unique Son of God. It is the Parable of the Tenants of the Vineyard (*Matthew 21.33-43, Mark 12.1-12, Luke 20.9-18*). A number of servants were sent by the owner of the vineyard to collect his fruits but they took one, stoned another and killed another. When he sent still more they did the same, beating some, wounding others and killing the rest. The climax is reached in these words:

He had still *one* other, a beloved *son*; finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son’. But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is *the heir*; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours’. And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.  
*Mark 12.6-8*

The interpretation of the parable is obvious - God had sent numerous *servants* to his people in their own promised land, namely the *prophets*, but they mistreated them and rejected them in various ways. As Peter said on another occasion, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (*Acts 7.52*). Finally he had sent his beloved *Son*, Jesus Christ, whom he predicted they would kill - a clear prophecy of his coming crucifixion. The contrast between the great prophets of old as nothing more than the servants of God, and the last messenger as the unique, beloved Son, cannot be mistaken. It is the whole thrust of the parable.

There are many other passages which can be used to show that Jesus Christ claimed to be the unique Son of God and never used the title for himself in a metaphorical or symbolic sense.

### 3.3 Biblical Limitations on the Son of God

**Muslim:** *If Jesus is the eternal Son of God, why did he so often speak of the Father as greater than he was in power, authority and knowledge? Surely, if he was divine as you claim, he should have been equally omnipotent and omniscient.*

Few Christians outside of Muslim evangelism have faced one of the most challenging arguments that Muslims often produce, namely that Jesus could not have been the eternal Son of God if he was limited in power and knowledge as many of his statements seem to suggest.

## The Knowledge and Power of Jesus

Three passages are often quoted by Muslims to prove their point. They all appear to limit his authority and status and we will consider each one in turn. In each case it will be seen that a very effective witness to the glory of Jesus can be given in reply to their arguments.

### 1. Divine Facts not Known to Jesus

Muslims reason that if Jesus, as the Son of God, was the second person of the divine Trinity, he should have known all things. If God is **omniscient**, he should also have had a universal knowledge. The following verse appears to undermine this assumption:

But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.  
*Matthew 24.36*

How could Jesus have been omniscient if he denied knowledge of the exact hour of judgment? The important thing is to see where Jesus places himself in the categories he mentions. No *man* knows the hour, not even the *angels* of heaven, nor the *Son*, but the *Father* only. There is clearly an ascending scale. Jesus places himself exclusively above all men and angels, relating himself solely in a divine context to the Lord of all the earth, defining himself in intimate terms - the Son of the Father. All that can be concluded is that, *despite* such a high status, it is possible for the Father, the eternal source of all things to whom both the Son and Spirit are subject, to decree the final Day without disclosing the exact time to anyone else. The limitation on the Son of God does not undermine his deity - it is merely indicates a special definition of it.

## 2. An Inability to do Anything without the Father

Just as Jesus does not appear to be omniscient, so there appears to be a challenge to his **omnipotence** in the following verses:

The Son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the Father doing ... I can do nothing on my own authority.

*John 5.19,30*

Once again, as soon as one looks at the context of these statements (which seem to indicate that Jesus was powerless in himself), it becomes clear that we are only dealing with an *explanation* of his relationship to the Father, not of a denial of his deity. Jesus goes on to say in the first statement "For whatever he does, that the Son does likewise". It is only a question again of subjection to the Father's authority. When it comes to the actual *power* to do what the Father does, Jesus claimed *equal* power to do *whatever* he does - a clear proof of his deity - and states that he *only* does what the Father does, a natural action when the two are one in a single Divine Being.

## 3. A Declaration of the Father's Superior Greatness

The third verse commonly used to prove limitations on the Son of God from his own statements is this one:

If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.

*John 14.28*

Muslims fasten on to this statement as a proof of Jesus' humility in acknowledging God's superior **greatness** to man, a declaration one might have expected from any true prophet. The fact is - no other prophet ever made such a declaration. In fact, were any ordinary man to make it, it would be close to

blasphemy. While it is a statement of limitation, it is also an awesome claim to greatness on Jesus' part! To have to actually inform his disciples that the Father, ultimately, is indeed greater than he is a clear sign that he held a great regard for his own greatness! Once again he measures himself on a divine level alone, relating himself solely to the Father. The limitation is purely in his role as the *Son* of God.

It is important to recognise that there *is* a limitation on the Son of God, one placed there in the sayings of Jesus himself. Too often Christians fall into the trap of proclaiming over-simplistic dogmatics, such as "We believe Jesus is God". Muslims will ask in return, "If Jesus is your God, will he ever forsake you?" to which the Christian might triumphantly proclaim "Never! He has promised 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (*Hebrews 13.5*)". The Muslim will then play his trump card: "Well, it is just as well that your god Jesus will not forsake you. Unfortunately his God forsook him: 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?' (*Matthew 27.46*). You pray to your god Jesus, but he prayed to *his* God and not very successfully. How can you expect us to believe in him?"

This is what happens when Christians are not careful in witness with Muslims or make bold statements that sound convincing purely because of the ease with which they can be emphatically stated, but are not entirely true. Jesus is the *Son* of God, a title which immediately implies a limitation upon him. The heart of what the Bible teaches about Jesus is this, namely that while the eternal Son is a divine personality in a Triune Being, he nevertheless is subject to the Father's authority and so, when on earth, could easily assume in human form a servant-master relationship. Son-to-Father simply became expressed as Man-to-God. In this unique person men can come to know God face-to-face for he who has seen the Son has seen the Father also (*John 14.9*). Yet likewise we see in Jesus a man like ourselves, able to assume our position and eventually bring us to eternal glory as the sons and daughters of God just as he is by nature the eternal Son of God. The more one understands this, the greater God's glory in Christ is revealed. We need to focus on this glorious truth in our witness to Muslims: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (*2 Corinthians 5.19*).

## 3.4 The Unique Sinlessness of Jesus

**Muslim:** *In what way was Jesus different to all the other messengers of Allah? They were all true to their task and taught their people only what Allah commanded them to say. The Qur'an does not distinguish between Jesus and the other prophets.*



Islam has made many attempts to undermine the uniqueness of Jesus, in particular its teachings that Muhammad was also a sinless prophet and that he performed many miracles. Neither of these has any foundation in the Qur'an (in fact they are totally contrary to Qur'anic teaching - *Surahs 47.19, 17.90-93*), but they have become popular because of the Muslim desire to try and prove that Muhammad was at least the equal of Jesus Christ.

In fact the announcement to Mary that she was to have a blameless son must be considered in its context. She had conceived a child without male intervention. Why? The angel's answer to her is effectively this: "You have experienced a *unique* conception because there is something very *unique* about him. He is the holy Son of God and, being eternal and without blemish, it is not possible that he could have been procreated in the normal manner". The Christian faith gives a very clear explanation of both the virgin-birth and the perfect sinlessness of Jesus. Islam, with its determination to reduce Jesus to the level of common prophethood (if I may use the expression to emphasise the contrast), can offer no such explanation other than to say it was simply an expression of the will and power of Allah.

### 3.5 Old Testament Prophecies of his Deity

**Muslim:** *Abraham, Moses and David were all great prophets and no different to Jesus. To this day the Jews like us cannot accept the idea that God has a Son or that a man can also be God. What proof do you have for this?*

Contrary to what Muslims suppose, there are numerous evidences that the prophets prior to Jesus knew that a great Messiah was coming and that he would be far greater than all the messengers of God before him.

#### Jesus and the Prophets Before Him

In his own teaching Jesus Christ spoke of many of the leading patriarchs and prophets before him and confirmed that they all foresaw his coming and knew he would be greater than them.

##### 1. Abraham who Foresaw the Day of Jesus

When Jesus was debating one day with the Jewish leaders and Pharisees they made much of the fact that they were descended from the great patriarch Abraham and that he was their father. (*John 8.33,39*). When Jesus stated that if anyone kept his word he would never see death, they responded:

Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?  
*John 8.53*

This passage is very important in the context of Muslim evangelism. The Muslims likewise believe Jesus was no greater than the other prophets but the Jews, from his own teaching, certainly got the impression that he was claiming to be superior to them all. How did Jesus respond? He said:

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, he saw it and was glad .. Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.  
*John 8.56,58*

Jesus made it plain that he was far greater than Abraham. The patriarch died because he was no different to any other man, but because Jesus is the eternal Son of God, he pre-existed Abraham in an eternal present state which ultimately knows no past or future: "Before Abraham was, **I AM!**" (*cf. Matthew 22.32* where Jesus said the same about God and Abraham).

##### 2. Jacob and the Water of Eternal Life

Jacob was another prophet who was held in great esteem, especially by the Samaritans who regarded him as their great patriarch. Jacob's well was just outside the city of Sychar in Samaria and this perennial source of water in the desert was regarded as Jacob's great legacy to them. When Jesus one day told a Samaritan woman at the well that he could give her **living water**, she asked him:

Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?  
*John 4.12*

As the Jews had asked "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" so this Samaritan asked "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" In each case the question focused on the *great patriarch* of their people. Again Jesus confirmed that he was purely because, being the eternal Son of God, he could give her living water from which she would never thirst, a well which would spring up within her to eternal life (*John 4.14*).

##### 3. Moses who Wrote of Jesus

On another occasion we read that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God (*John 5.18*). They had set their hope on Moses, the great lawgiver, and declared that they knew that God had spoken to Moses, but as for this man Jesus they proclaimed they had no idea where he came from (*John 9.29*). After a discourse in which Jesus

again claimed that he was the eternal Son of God and that no one honoured the Father unless he likewise honoured the Son, he concluded with these words:

If you believed Moses you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?  
*John 5.46-47*

Once again Jesus claimed to be superior to Moses in a context where he contrasted his divine power and character with the limited power of the prophet who had preceded him. As Abraham had foreseen his day, so Moses had written of him. Once again the focus fell on a great Messianic figurehead to come.

#### 4. David who Called Jesus his Lord

One last prophet needs to be mentioned. In another argument with the Jews Jesus, having answered all their questions, challenged them to identify the coming Messiah - whose son was he? They responded "the son of David" to which he replied:

How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I put your enemies under your feet"? If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?  
*Matthew 22.43-45*

Jesus, in his revelation to John on the Isle of Patmos, gave the answer: "I am the root and the offspring of David" (*Revelation 22.16*). He was indeed the son of David by direct descent from him but, because he is also the eternal son of God, he was David's root and his Lord. Thus he was also greater than David.

All these passages help to show how, in the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, the deity of Jesus was foreseen and honoured. **Abraham** had rejoiced that he was to see his day, **Moses** had written of him, and **David** had called him his Lord. All these great men had turned solely to **Jesus** as the great Messiah to come, one who had pre-existed them all, who alone could give the water of eternal life, and who likewise was their Lord and Saviour. Use these great themes in answering any Muslim argument that Jesus was no more than a prophet like those who had preceded him.

### 3.6 "Flesh and Blood have not Revealed This"

**Muslim:** Show me one place where Jesus said "I am God" and I will believe it. Prove to me that Jesus was the Son of God and I will accept it. All your arguments thusfar have failed to convince me. Why can you not prove this to my satisfaction?

I have quoted from an actual conversation with a Muslim in Durban, South Africa, many years ago. Christians who have worked in Muslim evangelism have often been frustrated and sometimes confused at the inability of Muslims to see the light even when it shines right before their eyes. I recall another incident where two of us were in a Muslim home with about seven Muslims, engrossed in a two-hour conversation on the subject of whether Jesus was the Son of God or not. I gave every proof I knew and, when we reached our car just as we were leaving, one of the young Muslim men said to me "You know I have to agree with you. It seems Jesus really did believe and preach that he was the Son of God". I was encouraged by this testimony, only for him to add "But if he did, I think he was wrong". You just cannot win sometimes!

### Perceiving that Jesus is the Son of God

Numerous Christians, brought up on a diet of Christian teaching through Sunday Schools and other Bible-training methods, freely believe that Jesus is the Son of God without further ado - and often without knowing *why* they believe it. It seems that what children are taught they easily accept. Get into conversation with a Muslim, however, who may present some of the cutting arguments we have considered against the deity of Jesus, and the Christian may soon find he cannot justify or explain what he really believes and why.

For Muslims, brought up on the teachings that God has no partner, that Jesus being a man could not be the Son of God, and that the Trinity makes no sense, turning around and believing in Jesus as the second person of a Triune Being takes some doing. I learnt many years ago that you simply *cannot* hope to persuade Muslims to believe in the Gospel by human reasoning alone. A divinely-inspired insight is necessary and I replied as such to the Muslim who posed the above questions to me. I turned to the following question Jesus put to his disciples:

Who do men say that the Son of man is? *Matthew 16.13*

Jesus had been with his disciples for some time, teaching the masses, healing diseases and infirmities, and doing many mighty works among them.



They answered that the people believed he was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. The common impression was that he was a prophet - which one, they were not sure, but one of the **prophets** nonetheless. After all he looked very little different to the others - a man without wealth proclaiming the Word of God and proving it with attendant signs like Moses, Elijah and Elisha before him.

When Jesus asked them, however, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter exclaimed "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Matthew 16.16*). What he was in effect saying is "the people say you are a prophet but I say you are more, you are **the Son of God**". Why did he say this? Had he, because of his closer association with Jesus, seen and heard things to guide him more perceptively to the truth? The answer of Jesus to Peter is very significant:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

*Matthew 16.17*

No, Peter had not worked it out for himself. God the Father had **revealed** to him who Jesus really was. We must never forget that we are only witnesses to God's truth in Muslim evangelism and that the work of enlightenment and conversion belongs to the Holy Spirit. So I told the Muslim enquirer that I could not prove that Jesus was the Son of God if he was determined not to believe this anyway. Only if he had an open mind which God could inspire would he see this truth.

## The Gospel - God's Revelation of Himself

Nonetheless, as Christians, we must do our part and testify to the truth. The Bible clearly states that faith only comes through hearing the Word of God (*Romans 10.17*) and we need to proclaim it and make a defence of it whenever called upon to do so. On this subject the question is not: "How can God become man or be contained within flesh and blood?" Once we admit that anything is possible to God the relevant question becomes "What has God *revealed* about himself?" The question, again, is not whether God can be confined in human form, it is purely whether humanity can bear the divine image. When he was on earth Jesus Christ manifested every one of God's perfect attributes to the full. That is why he said "He who sees me sees him who sent me" (*John 12.45*). In no way was God's divine character blurred while Jesus walked among men. On the contrary the fulness of God's love, kindness, grace and forgiveness were only finally revealed when his Son Jesus laid down his life so that we might be forgiven and live for ever.

The Qur'an, speaking of the occasion when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce to her the conception of a son without male intervention, says:

Then we sent to her our spirit which appeared to her as a man in all respects.  
*Surah 19.17*

The Qur'an itself freely admits that God sends his angels, who are spirit in form (*ruh*), in the exact likeness of human appearance. Why then cannot the Son of God, who is likewise spirit in form, not take actual human form? There is no reasonable argument against the possibility. In another place the Qur'an says:

Say, "If there were, settled on earth, angels walking about in peace and quiet, We should certainly have sent them down from the heavens an angel for an apostle".  
*Surah 17.95*

If, therefore, God would send an **angelic** messenger to angels on earth, would he not, if he wished personally to live among his people and redeem them from their sins, have likewise chosen to take the form of a **human** messenger? After all the Bible says that when God first created us he declared "Let us make man **in our own image**" (*Genesis 1.26*). If so, it must be obvious that the same human form can bear the image of God.

Jesus is indeed the Son of God. We must never be reserved about this great eternal truth. On the contrary we must set it forth before the Muslim world as effectively as we can - and pray that God's Holy Spirit will give the inner light to perceive it.

# Chapter Four

## The Crucifixion and the Atonement

### The Historical and Spiritual Issues

#### 4.1 The Consequences of Man's Fallen Nature

*Muslim:* No one can bear the sins of another. Every man is accountable for his own life. You have to make an effort to obey the laws of Allah and trust in his mercy to forgive your failures. Sins are bad deeds that must be cancelled out by good deeds.

One of the greatest differences between Islam and Christianity is the concept each has of **sin** and the effect it has on a man's relationship with God. According to the New Testament, the sin of Adam was not just an offence against God's holy laws but an act of defiance which set the whole human race in opposition to God (*Romans 3.9-18*), leaving all men by nature spiritually dead in their transgressions and iniquities and bound to follow the devil as sons of disobedience (*Ephesians 2.1-2*). Islam, however, teaches that men are neutral beings, capable of doing good or evil as they choose. While the Qur'an regularly laments the instinctive tendency of man to turn away from God and to be ungrateful to him, preferring rather to follow indulgent passions (*Surah 100, 6-8*), it does not regard the human failure to be perfectly obedient to God as a devastating chasm, separating God and man unless and until God should intervene and bring about a work of redemption as the Bible says he has done through the crucifixion, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ.

## Why the Atonement is Necessary

The ultimate question is not whether man is by nature as bad as the Bible makes him out to be, with a heart that is “desperately corrupt, deceitful above all things” (*Jeremiah 17.9*), but whether **God** is as **good** as the Bible declares him to be. According to Islam Allah is the Lord of the Universe whose attributes, such as righteousness, mercy and justice, are no more than that - just attributes. The Bible teaches, however, that God is, *within himself*, holy and righteous and that man, in breaking his holy laws, *falls short* of his absolutely holy character (*Romans 3.23*). How does one bring this across to a Muslim when he argues that Christianity has too pessimistic a view of human nature and that God does not need to save anyone, forgiving whomever he pleases as he chooses? One of the most effective ways is not to try to prove the doctrine of atonement but just to compare two men - **Adam** and **Jesus**, beginning with this passage:

For as by a man came death, by a man also has come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.  
*1 Corinthians 15.21-22*

All Muslims accept that Adam and Eve were chased out of the Garden of Eden when they sinned. The consequence of their disobedience was not simply a bad deed that could have been cancelled out by a good one, nor was it simply a matter of being forgiven by God. *They were never let back into the Garden*, nor has any member of the human race which has descended from them. Muslims in fact believe that the Garden was in heaven itself because its name in the Qur’an, *Jannatu’l `Adn*, is also a name for heaven (*Surah 9.72*). In discussion with Muslims I have found they will freely agree that Adam and Eve would not have died had they stayed in the Garden and that it was only on this decaying earth to which they were sent down that death became an inevitable destiny.

Muslims, therefore, should be able to see that the first sin of Adam and Eve had disastrous and ruinous consequences. I have often asked them - if Adam and Eve were forgiven, why were they not allowed back into the Garden? Why were they and all their offspring left to die on this earth? There is no answer in Islam. Yet Muslims freely believe that Jesus was taken up to heaven and is the only man alive in heaven who has never died. How did he get in there when all other men born on earth - from Adam to Muhammad and beyond - have come to nothing?

It is easy from there to point out that Jesus taught he would go to heaven because *he came from there in the first place*. He was not just an ordinary human being and his unique birth proves this. As Jesus said:

No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.  
*John 3.13*

I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and going to the Father.  
*John 16.28*

Muslims profess to prize logic, so use it with them. If we return to dust because we came from it, is it not logical to believe that Jesus went to heaven because he, too, came from there? I have found it very useful to go on to show that Jesus came down the **first** time to become like us, ordinary human beings, “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (*Romans 8.3*) to die as we do and to redeem us from our sins. He will come down from heaven the **second** time to make us like himself, in all his resplendent glory, so that we can live forever in the kingdom of heaven where he is. Just as he, when seen as he really is, could shine with all the glory of perfection, his face shining like the sun (*Matthew 17.2*), so we too will “shine like the sun” in the kingdom of our Father because of our faith in him and relationship with God through him (*Matthew 13.43*). If Christianity indeed has the most pessimistic view of human nature as it is - that it cannot redeem or save itself by any good work - then it also has the most optimistic view of what it can become! The only way back into the Garden from which **Adam** and all his offspring were dismissed is through **Jesus** who will return from heaven to take all his followers back there with him. Without his atoning work there is no other way anyone will ever get there.

## The Fall of Adam in the Qur’an

It is important to emphasise this by pointing out that the Qur’an supports the Bible in teaching that Adam’s transgression was not just a mistake or misdemeanour, or that he simply forgot God’s command not to eat of the forbidden fruit (as Muslims often argue), but that he fell from his high estate and was *driven out* from the Garden:

But the Devil made them slip from it and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. And We said: Fall down from here, some enemies to the others. And on the earth there will be a dwelling and provision for a time.  
*Surah 2.36*

The key word here is *ahbituu* which comes from the root word *habt* meaning to go down an incline or to descend from a high place to a low one. “Fall down!” was the order, literally “Get out of here!”. The consequences were also to be profound - enmity between men and an abode on the earth alone. It is very important to emphasise the fact that Adam and Eve were never allowed



## 2. God's Grace Delivers Believers from the Power of Sin

Perhaps the most important point to emphasise here is the fact that Jesus Christ died, not only to free us from the *guilt* of sin but also from its *power*. Jesus once said that whoever commits sin becomes a **slave** to sin (*John 8.34*). So often in conversation with Muslims I have asked them, if sin is merely a choice a man makes, why they cannot simply say to God "I know you want us to follow the right path (*Siratal-Mustaqim*). So from this day I choose never to sin again". Invariably they have smiled bemusedly at the suggestion, freely admitting that no one can make such a decision for the rest of his life, let alone for a single day. Often they say "We do not even know sometimes when we are sinning. What often appears to be right in our eyes can be wrong before God".

Many Muslims struggle with the painful awareness that the tendency to sin is a *compelling force*, an unfortunate reality about human nature. This where the effect of redemption comes into a Christian's life:

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.  
*Romans 6.17-18*

Faith in Jesus not only brings us the forgiveness of our sins but also gives us the power to overcome them in our lives. As the Apostle Paul said in another epistle Jesus came not only to "redeem us from all iniquity" but also to "purify for himself a people who are zealous for good deeds" (*Titus 2.14*). For many Muslims the prospect of an indwelling power to conquer sin is very attractive.

## 3. Being Filled with the Holy Spirit

Anyone who commits his life to Christ simultaneously receives the *Holy Spirit*. This is the third person of the Trinity who does not take control of our lives (God is too gracious to do this) but who gives us a love for God's commandments at the root of our being and, insofar as we submit to him, will deliver us from the powerful tendencies in our souls to pursue our own, sinful desires. I have found the following incident very useful when seeking to impress this fact on Muslims:

When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. *John 19.33-34*

John made much of this in the next verse, saying he had definitely seen it and recounted it so that his readers might **believe**. Believe what? Merely that

it had happened? Not likely, especially as the word "believe" is loaded with meaning throughout his Gospel. He meant so *that you might live by faith in Jesus*. It was the two liquids which poured from Jesus' side which impressed him.

The **blood** symbolised the *forgiveness* of sins just as the shedding of blood of bulls, lambs and goats in times past at the Temple had been the means by which God had overlooked the sins of the people. The **water**, however, symbolised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the rivers of *new life* which believers also receive. Water is a common symbol of divine power in the soul in this Gospel (*John 4.14, 7.38*). It should be obvious that this is a very useful illustration supporting Paul's teaching in Romans 6.

In conclusion it is also appropriate to challenge any Muslim who raises the argument that "if Jesus died for you, you can sin as you like" to quote from the Bible to prove exactly where he got this idea from. Alternatively you might gently suggest that, in expressing such a fallacy, the Muslim shows a painful ignorance of what the Bible really teaches and needs a brief explanation of what salvation is actually all about.

## 4.3 The Young Ruler and the Commandments

**Muslim:** *It is strange that you should say salvation comes through faith in Jesus. After all, Jesus himself taught that if you want to receive eternal life you must keep God's commandments. This is precisely what Islam teaches about true religion as well.*

Many Muslims are familiar with the story of the rich young ruler who approached Jesus and asked him what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (*Matthew 19.17*). They argue that Jesus never taught atonement but, as in this statement, called on all men to observe the commandments of God if they were to enter his kingdom. How does one answer this?

## No One is Good but God Alone

At times Muslims will also argue that Jesus also denied, in his discussion with the young man, that he had any **goodness** within himself because he was just an ordinary human being like everyone else. When the ruler called him a "good teacher", Jesus responded:

Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

*Mark 10.17-18*

Here is another excellent opportunity to turn an objection into an opportunity for witness, this time to the deity of Christ. He never denied that he was good, on the contrary he called himself the **Good Shepherd** who lays down his life for his sheep (*John 10.11*), echoing the statement of God himself at an earlier time “I myself will be the Shepherd of my sheep” (*Ezekiel 34.15*). There can be very little doubt that Jesus had this very statement in mind when he assumed the title Good Shepherd.

What he was in fact saying was “*Why do you call me good?*”. He was not denying goodness. The young ruler had, in the Hebrew language, called him a good *rabbi* (as in *John 1.38*). There were many such rabbis and teachers of the law in Israel at the time and, if the young man thought he was no more than any of them, he could well be asked why he had called this one “good” when God alone is good in an eternal sense. The response of Jesus is a challenge to him to declare whether he regarded Jesus as just one of the many teachers who gave their interpretations of religion as they derived them from their religious studies, or whether he saw in Jesus a **divine** uniqueness by which he would be able, with divine authority, to disclose the secret of **eternal** life. This comes out even more when one looks at the rest of the discussion between the two men.

## If you Would be Perfect, Follow Me

When Jesus told the young man that he could enter life by keeping the commandments, he asked “Which?”. Jesus then mentioned five of them, all of which dealt with a man’s relationship with his fellow man, but excluding the tenth “You shall not covet”. The young ruler responded that he had kept all of them since his youth - what did he still lack? Jesus, knowing his love of riches and covetous spirit, then challenged him:

If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.

*Matthew 19.21*

At this he went away sorrowful, unable to part with his great possessions. We see in this story, not that anyone can enter life simply by keeping the ten commandments, but rather that *no one can do so perfectly* as they must be kept if anyone wishes to enter life by them. God is perfect and his laws must accordingly be kept **perfectly** if they are to be kept at all in the true sense of the word. As another verse says:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

*James 2.10*

What Jesus was telling the young man, who thought he had kept all of God’s laws from his childhood, was that he needed to keep *every* law of God *always, perfectly, continually*. That is why Jesus told him that, if he would indeed be perfect, he needed to sell **all** his possessions and to renounce his materialistic spirit. Relative piety is unacceptable to a “holy God who shows himself holy in righteousness” (*Isaiah 5.16*). Instead, therefore, of finding eternal life through keeping God’s commandments the young man discovered that those laws could only convict him of sin. As the Apostle Paul said:

The very commandment which promised life proved death to me.

*Romans 7.10*

Jesus gave the young man a clear hint as to where salvation really lies when he said “If you would be perfect, .. *follow me*”. It is only in the atoning work of the Christ that perfection and salvation can ultimately be found. Far from being a denial of the deity of Jesus and the atonement this passage is a very definite affirmation of it.

## Other Proofs of the Atonement

The charge that Jesus never taught atonement can be met on other grounds as well. In a number of his statements he made it plain that he had come to earth expressly to save us from our sins and you will do well to quote them in conversation with Muslims on this subject:

The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

*Matthew 20.28*

The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

*John 6.51*

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

*John 10.11*

Perhaps the most obvious incident in Jesus’ life that clearly points to the atonement as God’s way of salvation is the **Last Supper** which he had with his disciples the last night he was with them just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Here he took bread, broke it and gave it to them saying “Take, eat, this is my body”. Then he took the cup of wine and gave it to them to drink, saying “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (*Matthew 26.26-28*).

It is virtually impossible to understand how anyone can suggest that Jesus never taught atonement in the face of such an event. It was the *very thing* he commended to his disciples on the last occasion he was with them before his death. Christians have, in response to Muslim objections such as those surrounding the story of the rich young ruler, tremendous opportunities to share the whole message of the Gospel with them at the same time as refuting their arguments.

#### 4.4 The Substitution Theory in the Qur'an

**Muslim:** *God would never have stood by watching while his enemies crucified his Son. To us Jesus was only a great prophet, yet Allah delivered him from the Jews who wanted to kill him. He was saved from the cross while another was crucified instead.*

Only one verse in the whole Qur'an deals with the subject of Jesus' crucifixion. The event is strongly denied as a calumny of the Jews against him. Their intention to kill him is not discounted, but Allah is said to have honoured his prophet by saving him from their hands while a bystander, whose appearance Allah changed so that he might look like Jesus, was crucified instead. There is no mention of the relevance of the event to the Christian faith, a surprising oversight considering the fact that the Bible teaches that Jesus laid down his life willingly for the salvation of all men and that this was the *express* purpose for the appearance of the Son of God in human form. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus there would have been no Christianity and the fact that it is central to our faith makes the omission of any reference to its Christian context in the Qur'an all the more remarkable. The verse is:

They said: "We killed the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, messenger of Allah; but they did not kill him, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them. Those who dispute about this are full of doubts, they have no certain knowledge but follow only conjecture. Assuredly they killed him not, but Allah raised him to himself. And Allah is the Mighty, the Wise." *Surah 4.157*

#### Implications of the Substitution Theory

The very interesting little expression, *wa laakin shubbiha lahum* - "but so it was made to appear to them", has led the Muslim world to believe that the physical features of another person were changed to look like those of Jesus and that he was **substituted** by God in the prophet's place. Jesus, instead, was taken

up to heaven where he remains alive until he will return to earth shortly before the end of time. The Qur'an comes tantalisingly close to admitting the Christian position - it accepts that the Jews came to arrest Jesus, that they intended to crucify him, that someone was indeed crucified, that to all intents and purposes the victim looked like Jesus, and that all who stood at the foot of the cross were persuaded that it really was him. In truth the expression "so it was made to appear to them" is somewhat vague and has led to some disputes in the Muslim world over what really happened to Jesus, but there remains a general consensus that someone else was transfigured to look like him and was accordingly crucified in his place.

In addition the Qur'an offers another striking coincidence - it makes the life of Jesus on earth end the same day that the Bible says it did. This ironically gives the substitution theory its only possible credibility - it wisely concludes Jesus' natural life the same day history draws it to a close. Yet, as we shall see, the theory has very little substance and can be ruthlessly challenged on many grounds. The important thing here is to answer Muslim denials of the crucifixion by first establishing the facts we hold in common. The only point in dispute is this - was it actually *Jesus* who was crucified (as the Bible teaches) or was it *someone else* (as the Qur'an teaches)? Once you have levelled the playing-field it becomes much easier to focus on this one supreme issue.

#### A Critical Analysis of the Theory

Not only is the Qur'anic teaching on what happened that day embarrassingly vague but the Muslim interpretation of it, the substitution theory, is extremely vulnerable on moral grounds and does not withstand the acid test of critical analysis. The following points can effectively be raised in discussion with Muslims on this subject:

##### 1. Why Should God have Victimised an Innocent Bystander?

If it was God's intention to save Jesus' alive by raising him to heaven, why should anyone have been crucified at all? It makes no sense. The very act of misrepresenting one man as another is a form of impersonation and we cannot accept that the "holy God who shows himself holy in righteousness" (*Isaiah 5.16*) would ever have done such a thing. Some Muslims say it was **Judas Iscariot** who was crucified (to remove the charge that an *innocent* bystander was crucified) but there is no identification of the victim in the Qur'an. The fact is, whoever was crucified was innocent of whatever wrongdoing Jesus was supposed to have done to warrant his death. The choice of Judas is simply an expedient to justify what God is supposed to have done that day. The Bible,

however, records very clearly what happened to Judas - when he saw that **Jesus** was going to be crucified, in great remorse he went out and hanged himself (*Matthew 27.5*. See also *Acts 1.18*).

## 2. Did God not Consider Jesus' Family and Disciples?

The second obvious objection to the Muslim theory is the effect the crucifixion would have had on those who were gathered around the cross. His mother Mary, her sister Mary the wife of Clopas, and two of his closest disciples Mary Magdalene and John the son of Zebedee, were "standing by the cross of Jesus" (*John 19.25*). If the person crucified was made to look exactly like Jesus, surely they would all have presumed it really was him? Why did God put the people who were closest to Jesus through the agony of watching him die? Would God have allowed his mother, revered in Islam as **Bibi Maryam** and the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an (*Surah 3.36, 19.16*), to have endured such torment purely because of an illusion of his own making? It is useful, at this point, to add that Jesus *actually addressed* Mary and John from the cross:

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" *John 19.26-27*

This is only one of seven sayings of Jesus from the cross and it clearly shows that the person crucified not only *looked* like Jesus but also *talked* as if it was him. Only Jesus himself could have shown such compassion for his mother. Anyone else would have spent his time crying from the cross that he had been crucified by mistake. To get to the truth Muslims only have to acknowledge one thing - that was indeed Jesus himself who was crucified!

## 3. Was Christianity Founded on a Hoax of God's Making?

The third objection to the Muslim theory is that, if the man crucified was made to look like Jesus, can you blame his disciples for actually thinking it was him? They went out and preached Christ crucified, being willing to lay down their lives for the Gospel message that Jesus died to save the world from its sinfulness. Did they found the whole Christian faith on a hoax, an illusion of which God himself was the deliberate author? The substitution theory makes God out to be the source of the greatest deception in religious history. The irony is that it is this theory which is perhaps the greatest of all historical delusions, one which has bound hundreds of millions of Muslims for fourteen centuries in unbelief. Under close analysis it is found to be riddled with improbabilities.

It is important in witness to Muslims to emphasise that the Bible *emphatically* teaches that Jesus was **crucified**, that he **died** on the cross, and

that he was **raised from the dead** on the third day. These two declarations, proclaimed by an angel to some of Jesus' female disciples the day of his resurrection and by the Apostle Peter to thousands of Jewish bystanders, set forth these great truths very concisely:

I know that you seek Jesus who was *crucified*. He is not here for he has *risen*, as he said. Come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the *dead*.

*Matthew 28.5-7*

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you *crucified* and *killed* by the hands of lawless men. But God *raised him up*, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

*Acts 2.23-24*

God is glorified in the Christian Gospel. The crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his only Son, is the greatest evidence of his love for us. It is the door to eternal life. It is the source of our complete forgiveness and ultimate redemption. The Muslim theory that someone else was crucified in Jesus' place, on the contrary, is meaningless. The event served no apparent purpose other than to victimise an innocent man, traumatise the followers of Jesus, and result in the formation of a religion based on a fallacy - all of Allah's own scheming and devising. Highly unlikely indeed!

## 4.5 The Swooning Theory of Muslim Apologists

**Muslim:** *It can be shown from the Bible that, even if Jesus was put on a cross, he did not die on it, but was taken down alive though in a swoon. Afterwards he recovered and appeared to many, hence the illusion that he had been raised from the dead.*

The untenable nature of the substitution theory and its obvious weaknesses has led some Muslim writers to attack the Biblical records of Jesus' crucifixion instead, attempting to prove what has become known as the alternative **swooning theory**. This is an old heresy, one which the **Ahmadiyya** branch of Islam first adopted through the teaching of its prophet, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who lived in India in the nineteenth century. It is important to know that, in 1974, followers of the Ahmadiyya Movement were declared *non-Muslims* in Pakistan. Their theory, however, has occasionally been taken over by mainstream Muslim authors as a convenient means of assaulting the Christian Gospel.



## Typical Evidences for the Ahmadiyya Theory

Conveniently ignoring every statement in the Gospels to the effect that Jesus died on the cross, these writers fasten on to certain passages, distort them out of context, and then re-interpret them to suggest that Jesus survived the cross. Let us consider a few prominent examples.

### 1. Jesus Prayed that God would Save him from Death

In the Garden of Gethsemane, shortly before being arrested, Jesus prayed “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as you will” (*Matthew 28.39*) and in response an angel was sent to him to strengthen him (*Luke 22.43*). It is argued that Jesus was reluctant to die and that the angel was sent to him to comfort him that he would be saved from death.

It is hard to see how Jesus could have been comforted by the knowledge that he would endure the horrors of the crucifixion right to the point of death itself and be saved only because, to all intents and purposes, he appeared to be dead when taken down from the cross. Here even the substitution theory makes more sense! Surely, if God had wished to save him from death, he would have delivered him completely from it? Why save him only after an unnecessary, tragic delay? In any event Jesus could have fled that night from Jerusalem and avoided arrest for he knew exactly what Judas Iscariot was doing in preparing his arrest (*John 18.4*). Jesus recoiled at the prospect of **separation from his Father** as he took God’s wrath against our sins on himself, a holy fear that made him sweat blood (*Luke 22.44*). The very prospect of being forsaken of his Father and left in the realm of sin and its consequences made Jesus momentarily withdraw in horror, yet he deferred to his Father’s will. The strength the angel gave him was to endure this ordeal, unparalleled in human history. The glorious resurrection of Jesus from the dead three days later was a much greater deliverance.

### 2. The Centurion Did not Ensure that Jesus was Dead

Much is made of the fact that when the Roman soldiers came to break the legs of the three men crucified that day, they left Jesus alone when they saw he was already dead (*John 19.33*). It is argued that they relied purely on a perception and made no attempt to ensure that Jesus had actually died. On the contrary, the soldiers would never have left such a thing to chance or their impressions. Consider this passage:

And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.  
*Mark 15.44-45*

The Roman governor was quite happy to accept the centurion’s confirmation because it was *fatal* for a Roman soldier to make a mistake in such a situation. When the Apostle Peter escaped from prison some time later in the same city, the sentries appointed to guard him were summarily executed (*Acts 12.19*). When a jailer supposed that Paul and Silas had also escaped from prison, “he drew his sword and was about to kill himself” (*Acts 16.27*). Death was the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape - what could the centurion expect if he allowed a *condemned* man to escape because of some careless observations? No one but he could have been such a reliable witness to Jesus’ death on the cross! In fact one of the soldiers thrust a sword right into Jesus’ side (*John 19.34*) to make totally sure. This act alone would have been sufficient to kill him.

### 3. The Jews Doubted that Jesus was Dead

Another typical argument is that the Jewish leaders were concerned that Jesus was still alive after being brought down from the cross and went to Pilate to have his tomb properly sealed to ensure that he could not escape. It is based on their statement to the governor:

Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again”.  
*Matthew 27.63*

Once again the argument conveniently ignores clear statements in the context of the incident which show that, far from thinking Jesus might recover his health, the Jews were concerned that Jesus’ *disciples* might come and steal his body away and that *they* might proclaim that he had risen from the dead (*Matthew 27.64*).

There are two points that make it obvious what they really feared. Firstly they spoke of what Jesus had said while he was “still alive”, implying that they were clearly satisfied he was now **dead**. Secondly they acted on a prophecy Jesus had often made, namely that after he was **killed**, he would rise on the third day (*Luke 9.22*).

The swooning theory has no substance whatsoever. It relies on reading between the lines (which some Muslim proponents actually admit) rather than a careful study of the lines themselves. The theory serves only one purpose - to show how embarrassing the substitution theory is to many Muslims and to what lengths they will go to attack the Biblical records instead.

## 4.6 What Really was the Sign of Jonah?

**Muslim:** *Jesus spoke of the Sign of Jonah as the only sign he was prepared to give the Jews. Yet it is obvious that Jonah did not die in the stomach of the fish and Jesus did not spend three days and three nights in the tomb as he said he would.*

Muslims fasten on to the Sign of Jonah to further the swooning theory and to challenge the parallel Jesus brought between the time Jonah spent in the depths of the ocean and the time he would spend buried in the earth. Let us consider the two arguments they produce, especially as they are quite commonly advanced in the Muslim world.

### Was Jesus Dead or Alive in the Tomb?

No one doubts that Jonah was alive throughout his ordeal, nor has it ever been suggested that he rose from the dead when he was released on dry land. If so, Muslims argue, Jesus also must have been in the tomb without dying until the stone was rolled away from it. Otherwise, how could Jesus use Jonah's experience as a sign of his own resurrection from the dead? When one reads the whole statement of Jesus, however, it is obvious that the likeness was confined to the **time-factor**:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.  
*Matthew 12.40*

It is quite clear that the likeness is in the time each would spend hidden from public view from which a reappearance was *most* unlikely, Jonah in a fish and Jesus in a tomb. The issue is the time-period of three days and three nights. It cannot be stretched to include the state each was in, namely to say "if Jonah was *alive*, then Jesus too must have been *alive*."

This comes clear from another similar statement of Jesus where he again, in the context of his coming crucifixion, drew a comparison between his coming death and an Old Testament incident:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.  
*John 3.14*

Here the likeness is clearly confined to the state of being *lifted up* and impaled, the serpent on a pole and Jesus on a cross. The first had been publicly

lifted for the healing of the Jews bitten by serpents, the second for the healing of the nations bound in sin. In this case, however, the serpent was a brass object. At no time had it ever been alive. It was dead when nailed to the pole and dead when it was taken down. If you apply the same Muslim logic here it means Jesus must have been dead before he was ever nailed to the cross!

It is quite obvious that, in each case, the living state or otherwise of the objects compared to was not relevant to the point Jesus was making. The likeness was clearly confined to the actual point of similarity he mentioned - in Jonah's case the **time-period** of three days and nights, and in the case of the brass serpent to the action of being **lifted up**.

### The Three Days and Three Nights

It is universally agreed among Christians (with a few exceptions) that Jesus was crucified on a Friday and that he rose from the dead early on the following Sunday morning. Muslims argue that, if that was indeed the case, the Sign of Jonah has no meaning because Jonah was *three* days and *three* nights in the stomach of the fish. Jesus was, quite obviously, only *two nights* (Friday and Saturday) in the tomb and hardly three days as well. The time-period of three days and nights is 72 hours, but Jesus could not have been more than 33 hours in the tomb (3pm Friday to 6am Sunday).

What these Muslims fail to appreciate is that there is a major difference between **Hebrew** speech in the first century and **English** speech in the twentieth century. In those days Jews counted *any* part of a day as a *whole* day when calculating consecutive periods of time. Jesus was laid in the tomb of the Friday, lay in it throughout the Saturday, and only rose sometime before dawn on the Sunday. As the Sunday actually started at sunset the previous evening according to the Jewish calendar Jesus was in the tomb for a very definite period of three days according to Jewish reckoning. The question is why there were only two nights in between.

One needs to understand the Hebrew colloquialisms of the time. The expression *three days and three nights* is the sort of expression we never use in the spoken English language today. Its meaning must therefore be sought in the context of its first-century Hebrew use. Today we will say "I'll be away for two weeks" or for a "fortnight", never intending this to mean a precise period of fourteen days and fourteen nights. Yet the Bible often uses this figure of speech. Moses fasted for *forty days and forty nights* in the wilderness (*Exodus 24.18*) while Job's friends sat with him for *seven days and seven nights* during his illness (*Job 2.13*). No Jew would ever have spoken of "three days and two

nights” or “seven days and six nights” even if this was the exact period he was describing. It was a **general** period of three days that Jesus was speaking of and, incidentally, which Jonah spent in the depth of the sea.

A fine example of this is found in the Old Testament where it is said that Queen Esther commanded that no one should eat for “three days, night or day” (*Esther 4.16*) but on the *third day*, after only *two* nights, she went into the king’s chamber and the fast was ended. The expression **three days and three nights** was a Jewish colloquialism meaning *any period* of time covering three days. This is really obvious from how the Jews reacted to Jesus’ saying once he had been buried. When they said to Pilate that they remembered how Jesus had said he would rise again *after three days*, they requested him to secure the sepulchre until the third day (*Matthew 27.64*). It was after only one night, on the day after his crucifixion (Saturday), that they urged the governor to act immediately. In our speech today we would have taken Jesus’ statement that he would rise after three days to mean sometime on the fourth day.

The Jews, however, knowing their own colloquialisms, took Jesus to mean he would rise on the *third* day, namely Sunday, after only two nights. This is why they were only concerned to have the tomb secured *until* the third day. They knew he did not mean he would be buried for an exact period of 72 hours but only for a portion of three days. The important thing is to interpret the saying in first-century terms and not according to our forms of speech today.

When the disciples of Jesus boldly declared that Jesus had risen from the dead on the **third** day (*Acts 10.40*), no one ever attempted to counter this testimony by claiming they were contradicting Jesus’ statement that he would be three days *and* three nights in the heart of the earth.

In conclusion it must be said that, when Muslims raise the subject of the Sign of Jonah, they create a wonderful opportunity to witness to them of precisely what it was - a symbol of Jesus’ **crucifixion, death and resurrection** from the dead three days later.

# Chapter Five

## Muhammad in the Bible?

### Muslim Arguments from Biblical Texts

#### 5.1 The Prophet Like Moses in Deuteronomy 18

**Muslim:** *In the original Tawraat there were clear predictions of the coming of our holy Prophet. One of them survives and is found in Deuteronomy 18.18 where Moses clearly foretells the coming of another prophet who would be just like him.*

One of the great arguments raised by Muslims in discussion with Christians is their claim that Muhammad is foretold in the Bible. The issue derives from a passage in the Qur’an which has led Muslim scholars, from the earliest days of Islam, to search for passages in both the Old and New Testaments to prove that their Prophet’s coming was indeed prophesied by the former prophets. Some of the books Muslims have written on this subject draw numerous passages from all over the Old Testament and one or two from the New but, in general conversation with Muslims, only two prominent examples are usually put forward and it is these that we will consider in this chapter. The Qur’anic verse is:

Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet, will find him mentioned in the (books) with them, in the *Tawraat* and the *Injil*.  
*Surah 7.157*

In both cases Christians will find that there can be no doubt that the particular passages refer to Jesus and the Holy Spirit respectively.

## Muslim Arguments on the Prophet “Like Unto” Moses

The first of the prophecies they claim foretells the advent of their Prophet is found in the following passage where God addresses Moses:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.  
*Deuteronomy 18.18*

The first argument is that Muhammad must be the prophet foretold because he was **like Moses** in a way that none of the other prophets were. As Christians claim the prophecy refers to Jesus Muslims argue further that they do not have to consider any other prophets but only have to bring comparisons between Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The arguments run generally like this:

### 1. Moses and Muhammad led Normal Lives in Every Way

Their lives followed a perfectly *normal course* unlike Jesus where every feature of his life was unique or unusual. They both had a father and a mother whereas Jesus was born of a virgin-woman and had no human father. Both died normal deaths at the end of lives that went their full course whereas, according to the Bible, Jesus died tragically when he was only thirty-three. Moses and Muhammad both married but Jesus remained a bachelor all his life. So Muhammad must be the prophet who was to come like Moses.

### 2. Moses and Muhammad Became the Leaders of their People

In the later years of their lives, after initially being rejected by the Jews and Arabs respectively, Moses and Muhammad became the *political and religious leaders* of their nations. They died as undisputed rulers whereas Jesus had only a few followers at the end of his life, having been rejected by the chief priests and the people.

### 3. Their Successors both Conquered the Land of Palestine

Shortly after their deaths successors to both Moses and Muhammad led armies into the land of *Palestine and conquered* it. Joshua conquered the land of Canaan, as it was then known, and settled the Jews in what became the land of Israel while Umar, the second Caliph after Muhammad, conquered the same land for Islam and settled Muslim Arabs in it where they are to this day. Jesus, however, was driven out of Jerusalem and put to death by the Romans who continued to rule the land for centuries to come.

Similar arguments are put forward to supposedly prove that it was Muhammad, and not Jesus, whose coming was foretold.

## The Key Features of the Unique Prophet to Come

The Muslim arguments hardly touch on the key issue. Moses was a **unique** prophet who had been commissioned to introduce a covenant between God and the people of Israel. The prophet who would be **like him** would obviously have to have certain distinguishing features that would make him like Moses in a way no other prophet was. Christians can argue like Muslims that Moses and Jesus both left Egypt to fulfil their ministries which Muhammad never did. “By faith he forsook Egypt” the Bible says of Moses (*Hebrews 11.27*), and again “Out of Egypt have I called my Son” it says of Jesus (*Matthew 2.15*). What, however, were the *unique* features in Moses’ prophethood? Let us consider them.

### 1. Moses was the Mediator of a Covenant

In the same passage as the prophecy we are reviewing God said to the people of Israel that he would indeed raise up for them a prophet like Moses, “just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly” when they had pleaded that God speak to them through a mediator only (*Deuteronomy 18.16*). Moses **mediated a covenant** between God and the people when, after the ten commandments and other laws had been delivered to them, he anointed the Book of the Law and the people with the sprinkled blood of calves and goats as well as the tabernacle and vessels used in worship, saying “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you” (*Hebrews 9.20*).

### 2. Moses Knew God Face-to-Face

Moses had a unique relationship with God. For forty years unabated God spoke to him **directly** in a way he never did with any prophet who preceded or followed him. The Bible says:

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.  
*Exodus 33.11*

The Qur’an confirms this unique relationship, saying “And to Moses Allah spoke directly” (*Surah 4.164*) in contrast with another verse where the Qur’an says “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” (*Surah 42.51*). We need, therefore, to look for a prophet who had a similar unique relationship.

### 3. Moses Performed Great Signs and Wonders

For many years Moses performed many **miracles**, such as the many plagues he brought down on Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea and the daily manna from

heaven. No prophet could be said to be like Moses if he could not do the same. We have already seen that Muhammad performed no miracles during his life according to the Qur'an and the following charge against him by the pagan Arabs during the time of his own mission is very significant:

Why are not (signs) sent to him, like those which were sent to Moses?  
*Surah 28.48*

Simply put, the argument is that if Muhammad was indeed the great prophet he claimed to be, why was he *not like* Moses in the key features of his prophethood? Muhammad mediated no covenant, did not know God face-to-face (the Qur'an, according to all Hadith records and Surah 2.97, was mediated to him solely through the Angel *Jibril*), and performed no miracles. So he cannot be the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18. This verse, describing Moses' ministry at the end of his life, emphasises the uniqueness of his prophethood:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land. *Deuteronomy 34. 10-11*

It is clear from this passage that the prophet to come who would be **like Moses** would be identified at least by his close direct relationship with God and by many signs and wonders attending his ministry. That prophet could only be Jesus as we shall see in the next section.

## 5.2 Jesus - The Prophet Foretold by Moses

**Muslim:** *What evidences do you have for your claim that Jesus was the prophet foretold by Moses? He was a great prophet but his mission appears to have ended in failure after just a few years. He did not share the greatness of Moses and Muhammad.*

It is important, right at the start, to point out to Muslims that the Bible expressly applies the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18.18 to Jesus on two occasions. The Apostle Peter, claiming that God had foretold the coming of Jesus through all the prophets, quoted the text as proof that Moses had done so (*Acts 3.22*). Stephen, the early Christian martyr, also appealed to the same text as proof that Moses was one of those who had "announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One", Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had now betrayed and crucified (*Acts 7.37*). We will proceed to see how Jesus fulfilled the three unique features we have already considered.

## The Mediator of the New Covenant

Muslims occasionally argue that, according to Christian belief, Jesus was the Son of God and could not have been a prophet in the normal way. In reply there are numerous passages where Jesus called himself a prophet (eg. *Matthew 13.57*) as well as the Son of God (*John 10.36*). Having taken human form to proclaim the Word of God just the previous prophets had done made him likewise a prophet in the true sense of the word. Let us now see how he was the prophet to come like Moses.

### 1. Jesus was also the Mediator of a Covenant

At the time of Jeremiah, many centuries after Moses' time but long before the days of Jesus, God promised that he would make a **new covenant** between himself and his people. As the nation of Israel had consistently rejected his laws he regarded the original covenant made with Moses obsolete, but promised that he would now enter into a special relationship with his own people by forgiving their sins and writing his laws on their hearts (*Jeremiah 31. 31-34*). The New Testament declares that **Jesus** was the mediator of this covenant (*Hebrews 9.15*). To ratify the first covenant we read:

Moses took the blood and threw it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words". *Exodus 24.8*

As the first covenant had been mediated through Moses and ratified with blood it was only to be expected that the prophet to follow like Moses would do likewise. So, just before his death on the cross, Jesus said:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. *1 Corinthians 11.25*

### 2. Jesus also Knew God Face-to-Face

Just as Moses knew God directly and communicated with him personally throughout his ministry, so Jesus could say "I know him, I come from him, and he sent me" (*John 7.29*). On many other occasions he made it clear that he had seen God face-to-face, such as in these words "Not that anyone has ever seen the Father except him who is from God - he has seen the Father" (*John 6.46*). The most telling comparison at this point is found in two passages which speak of the effect of the close relationship Moses and Jesus had with God. The first tells what happened when Moses spoke with God face-to-face:

Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. *Exodus 34. 29-30*

When the image of the invisible God was directly revealed through Jesus as God spoke of him as his own Beloved Son, we read:

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. *Matthew 17.2*

No other prophet could claim such a distinction. No one else knew God face-to-face in such a way that his face shone as he communed with him. Certainly there are no evidences anywhere in the Qur'an or any other Muslim records that Muhammad ever emulated the experience. Even the story of *al-Mir'aj*, his supposed ascension to heaven, do not state that his face ever shone in any way.

### 3. Jesus Likewise Performed Great Miracles

There are numerous stories of great miracles which Jesus did during his life but once again a direct parallel with Moses will help to emphasise the likeness between them. Both of them had **power to control the sea**, a feat never emulated by any other prophet.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind. *Exodus 14.21*

Other prophets after Moses had power over rivers (*Joshua 3.13*, *2 Kings 2.14*) but no one could emulate Moses' great miracle of controlling the sea until Jesus stood over the Sea of Galilee one night and, during a raging storm, calmed it with just three words "Peace - be still" (*Mark 4.39*). His disciples exclaimed:

What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him? *Matthew 8.27*

One of Moses' greatest miracles was to feed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai with bread known as manna which appeared on the ground every day. When the Jews saw Jesus feed five thousand people besides women and children from only five loaves of bread and two fishes so that there was enough left over to fill twelve baskets, they immediately recalled Moses' prophecy.

When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." *John 6.14*

When they saw the *sign*, they declared that Jesus was the *prophet*, the one foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18.18. There can be no doubt from all these evidences that **Jesus** is the prophet whose coming was prophesied by

**Moses** and not Muhammad. The evidences relating to the unique features of his life, specifically named in Deuteronomy 34. 10-11 as the ones which would identify the coming prophet, prove conclusively that he was the one of whom God spoke to the people of Israel.

## 5.3 The Prophet From Among their Brethren

**Muslim:** *The promise was of a prophet to come from among the brethren of the Israelites. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and their brethren were the Ishmaelites. Muhammad was descended from Ishmael and he is therefore the prophet.*

This is one of the favourite arguments of Muslims in trying to prove that the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18 was Muhammad. They emphasise the words "from among their brethren", assuming that it is the "brethren" of the Israelites as a nation that are spoken of in the prophecy. A brief survey of the context of the passage shows quite conclusively that it was not the Ishmaelites who were in mind.

### The Brethren of the Levites

The prophecy in Deuteronomy 18.18 is set in a context of a whole discourse where God gave Moses certain directions about the future conduct of the people of Israel once they reached the promised land, *especially* the Levites, the priestly tribe. A look at the first two verses of the chapter will reveal very clearly who God was speaking of when he said he would raise up for *them* a prophet from among *their brethren*.

The Levitical priests, that is, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel .... They shall have no inheritance among their brethren. *Deuteronomy 18. 1-2*

It is abundantly clear here that *they* means the **Levites**, and that *their brethren* means the other **tribes of Israel**. No honest method of interpretation can possibly yield any other conclusion. Therefore the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 18.18 must be: "I will raise up for *them* (the **Levites**) a prophet like you from among *their brethren* (the other eleven tribes of **Israel**)". Therefore the passage cannot refer to the Ishmaelites and the prophecy most certainly cannot apply to Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

It is interesting to note that, throughout the Old Testament, the expression "their brethren" often occurs and in every case it refers to one of the

tribes of Israel as distinct from the one actually mentioned. A typical example is found in the following verse where there can be no doubt as to who the brethren are:

But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. *Judges 20.13*

Here “their brethren” is specifically stated to be the other members of the nation of Israel as distinct from the tribe of **Benjamin**. In the same way Deuteronomy 18.18 refers to the other tribes of Israel as distinct from the tribe of **Levi**. In another passage we read that Moses said to the people of Israel:

One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. *Deuteronomy 17.5*

Only one of the *brethren* of the Israelites could be appointed as king over the nation. They were not allowed to place a *foreigner*, such as an Ishmaelite, over them. Here the principle is reinforced that the prophet who was to come from among “their brethren” was to be an Israelite, only not one of the people of the tribe of Levi. In Europe for many centuries it has been customary for monarchs to come from various nations so as to maintain a close relationship between the various countries. German, British, French and Greek princes have often intermarried with princesses or other royal women from other nations. In Israel, however, there was an express command to the people that they were *not* to put anyone from another nation over them as king because they had been set apart as the people of God distinct from the pagan nations around them.

## Jesus the Prophet from Among Their Brethren

Do we have any evidences, however, to prove that **Jesus** qualifies as the prophet foretold in this particular context? The New Testament quite clearly records that Jesus was descended from **Judah** through the line of David. He is expressly said to have descended from “Judah, the son of Jacob” (*Luke 3.33*) and in another place we read “Now it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah” (*Hebrews 7.14*). Jesus is therefore obviously the one who was to come from one of the other tribes of Israel. Together with the other evidences we have considered three can be no doubt that he is the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18. Muhammad meets none of the vital criterion for qualifying for this office.

Other Muslim arguments in favour of Muhammad also do not stand the test of close scrutiny. God said of the prophet to come “I will put my words

in his mouth” and Muslims say that, by revealing the **Qur’an** to Muhammad who repeated it to his followers, the prophecy was fulfilled. According to Islam, however, the **Tawraat** was equally so revealed to Moses, the **Zabur** to David, and the **Injil** to Jesus. So each of them had the words of God in their mouths. To Jeremiah God said “Behold I have put my words in your mouth” (*Jeremiah 1.9*).

Likewise God went on to say to Moses “he shall speak to them all that I command him”. Jesus once said to his disciples:

For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. *John 12.49*

The Muslims can raise no unique evidences to prove, from the context of the prophecy, that Muhammad was the prophet foretold in *Deuteronomy 18.18*.

Another argument centres on the questions the Jews once put to John the Baptist after he denied that he was the Christ, namely whether he was Elijah and, if not, whether he was the Prophet? (*John 1.21*). They argue that the Jews distinguished between Elijah, the Christ and the Prophet, and that they were, in order, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muhammad.

Nothing conclusive can be drawn from the speculations of the Jews, however. Once they said of Jesus “This is indeed the prophet” (*John 7.40*). On another occasion they concluded he was “one of the prophets” (*Matthew 16.14*), on another “a prophet” (*Mark 6.15*), and thought of him as both Elijah (*Mark 6.15*) and as possibly John the Baptist himself (*Matthew 16.14*). Nothing conclusive can be drawn from their guesswork.

There can be no doubt, from all we have considered, that it was Jesus Christ and not Muhammad whose coming was foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18.18.

## 5.4 Jesus’ Promise of the Coming Comforter

**Muslim:** According to your Bible did not Jesus speak of another prophet to come after him whom he called the Comforter? This was obviously a prophecy of the coming of our holy prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an even confirms the prophecy.

The greatest of all the Muslim claims that Muhammad is foretold in the Bible comes from the promise of Jesus to his disciples, recorded four times in John’s Gospel, that he would be followed by yet another person sent from

God whom he called the Comforter, one who would guide them into all the truth. From the earliest centuries of Islam Muslim scholars have endeavoured to prove that **the Comforter** was Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Of all the challenges made to Christians in witness among Muslims, this one is undoubtedly the most frequent. Yet even here Christians have, when responding to their arguments, tremendous opportunities for witness to Muslims of who the Comforter really is - the Holy Spirit - and how he fulfils the redeeming work of Jesus.

## Muslim Arguments about the Comforter

It is in the following texts that Muslims believe they have proof that Muhammad was duly foretold by Jesus in terms of the Qur'anic text which states that they would find his coming prophesied in the *Injil* as well as the *Tawraat* (*Surah 4.157*):

But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.  
*John 14.26*

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.  
*John 16.7*

Both these sayings come from a lengthy discourse of Jesus on the last night he was with his disciples before his crucifixion. On two other occasions in the same discourse he again spoke of the coming Comforter (*John 14.16, 15.26*). Muslims claim that he was undoubtedly speaking of Muhammad for the following reasons:

### 1. Muhammad Led the World into all the Truth

Muslims argue that, when Jesus said the Comforter will “teach you all things”, this was fulfilled in their Prophet who, in delivering the Qur'an, taught the world all it needs to know about God, his laws, and the way of life he expects his servants to follow. So likewise, when Jesus said “he will declare to you the things that are to come” (*John 16.13*), Muhammad is claimed to have done exactly this as the Qur'an discourses at length on the Last Day (*Yawma'l Akhir*), the Resurrection, the Final Judgment, and the destiny of the human race to heaven (*Jannat*) or hell (*Jahannam*).

### 2. The Use of the Masculine Gender

Muslims often make much of the fact that, in speaking of the coming Comforter, Jesus used the *masculine* gender no less than eight times. They argue that, when Jesus said “**He** will glorify me, **he** will not speak on his own authority, **he** will guide you into all truth”, etc., he was obviously speaking of a *man*, a prophet, and not the Holy Spirit. A spirit it is claimed, being neither male nor female, cannot be spoken of in anything but the neutral gender but, as Jesus consistently used the word *he* to describe the Comforter, this must refer to a male prophet, namely Muhammad.

### 3. The Comforter Was to Come after Jesus

The third argument commonly used by Muslims to prove their case is that, as Jesus said the Comforter would not come until he had gone away, this must mean Muhammad. Once again, they reason, it cannot refer to the Holy Spirit because, according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit had always been there. David prayed that God would not take his Spirit from him (*Psalms 51.11*) while John the Baptist was said to have been filled with Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (*Luke 1.15*).

## The Christian Response to these Arguments

There are simple answers to these three arguments. A careful study of the whole context of the relevant verses shows quite clearly that Jesus was speaking of the **Holy Spirit** who indeed came down within ten days after Jesus' ascension as he had promised (*Acts 2. 1-21*).

Firstly, the Holy Spirit duly brought to the remembrance of Jesus' disciples all that he had said to them. John only wrote his Gospel some sixty years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, yet he was able to record the whole of his last discourse to his disciples accurately in no less than four chapters (*John 13.1 - 16.33*). The complete teaching which followed is recorded, not in the Qur'an, but in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. All its teaching is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit (*2 Timothy 3.16*) and none of it is subject to man's interpretation, because it never came through human impulse since “men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God” (*2 Peter 1.21*).

Secondly, throughout the Bible both God and the Holy Spirit are always referred to in the masculine gender. “**He** is your Praise, **he** is your God” (*Deuteronomy 10.21*) is a typical example of its constant use to describe the Divine Being even though God is not man but spirit (*John 4.24*). The Muslim



argument can be turned on its head by referring to a passage of the Qur'an where Allah is spoken of in the masculine gender no less than seven times in quick succession (*Surah 59. 22-24*). "He is Allah and there is no god besides whom he is" is the middle text (v.23) and it begins and ends with the masculine *huwa* ("he is") and not the neutral *hiya* ("it is"). If Allah, who is spirit and not man, can nonetheless be spoken of in the masculine gender in the Qur'an, why can the Holy Spirit likewise not be spoken of in the same terms? There is no hint in the four sayings of Jesus about the Comforter that he would be a man or a prophet, rather he is expressly identified as the **Holy Spirit** (*John 14.26*).

Thirdly, Jesus not only said he had to go away before the Comforter would come, but also promised that he would personally send him to his own disciples, to Peter, James, John and the rest. "I will send him **to you**" he said (*John 16.7*), not to Arabs in Mecca or Medina six centuries later. It could hardly have been to the disciples' advantage if the Comforter was not to come almost immediately after Jesus left the earth. When he was about to ascend to heaven Jesus expressly told them to wait a short while in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit before they went out proclaiming the Gospel (*Acts 1.4-5*). The Comforter had indeed been present in the world before this time but now he was to be poured out in a new way right into the hearts of all who believed in Jesus. They had experienced the ministry and presence of Jesus with them for three years but now his presence was to be known in a way even more to their advantage - by the fact of the Spirit actually living within them.

## 5.5 "His Name Shall be Ahmad" in the Qur'an

**Muslim:** According to the Qur'an Jesus specifically predicted the coming of Muhammad as the "Praised One". This was his actual prophecy. You Christians have since changed the original word *Periklutos* ("Praised") into *Paracletos* ("Comforter").

Muslims particularly concentrate on Jesus' promise of a coming Comforter because it seems to confirm a similar text in the Qur'an where he is said to have expressly predicted the coming of Muhammad:

And remember Jesus, son of Mary, said "O Children of Israel! I am a messenger of Allah to you, confirming what is before me from the *Tawraat*, and announcing tidings of a messenger to follow me whose name shall be Ahmad".  
*Surah 61.6*

Although the prediction is not of Muhammad by his actual name, Muslim scholars point out that Ahmad comes from the same three root letters as his own name, *hmd*, meaning "praise". It seems Muhammad knew that Jesus

had spoken of someone to follow him but had not done so by name and, for this reason, he avoided any mention of himself personally in adapting the prophecy to the Qur'an, using a title as close to his name as he could to ensure the necessary inference that it was him.

## Periklutos or Parakletos?

The original word in John's Gospel translated as "Comforter" is **paracletos**, meaning (as the English equivalent "paraclete" implies) one who clings closely as a counsellor, consoler or mentor. It *never* means "one who is praised". It is obvious from the sayings of Jesus that the original word is the correct one as everything he had to say about the Comforter related precisely to this concept of a close adviser.

"He will take what is mine and declare it to you" is typical of the description Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit. He was to dwell in hearts of his disciples and would give them an insight and guidance into God's ways and the power to fulfil them from within their own souls. He would come to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment as God's agent speaking through the witness and proclamations of Jesus' disciples.

Nevertheless Muslims have, in their writings, argued that the Christian world has corrupted the original saying of Jesus and that it incorporated the word **periklutos** which means "Praised One". This roughly coincides with the title *Ahmad* in the Qur'an, having the same basic meaning. Is there any substance in the Muslim claim? Are there any evidences to prove it?

### 1. Periklutos is not a Biblical Word

There is no manuscript evidence whatsoever that the original word may have been *periklutos*. In fact the word nowhere appears in the Greek New Testament and is accordingly not a Biblical Word. The Muslim claim is based, not on any kind of concrete, factual testimony but purely on a supposition to suit themselves.

### 2. The Word does not Fit into the Context

As pointed out already, the definition of the coming one whom Jesus promised was primarily of a counsellor and advocate. There is nothing in all four sayings of Jesus about the Comforter to support the contention that he was to be "the Praised One". On the contrary, when Jesus said "he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak" (*John 16.13*) he made it clear he

would specifically not draw attention to himself. “He will glorify **me**” Jesus went on to say (*John 16.14*), meaning he would give praise to Jesus through the witness of his followers rather than claim any praise for himself.

### 3. It is Muslims who are Changing the Bible

The irony of this issue is that we have here clear evidence of a Muslim attempt to do what they have always wrongly accused the Christian world of doing, namely of trying to change the Bible to suit their own preferences! They have had to resort to a strange distortion to make the prophecy of Jesus fit Muhammad, and purely to bring into being some kind of connection with the name (or title) *Ahmad* in the Qur’an. It is clear they cannot prove their point directly from the Biblical texts as they stand.

There is no justification for the claim that the original word used by Jesus was *periklutos* or any Hebrew equivalent of it. Most importantly, as we have seen, it does not linguistically fit the context of his sayings.

## The Title Ahmad in the Qur’an

There have been a number of disputes over the years about the employment of the word *Ahmad* in the Qur’an. Today it is a common first name among Muslims throughout the world, but there is no evidence in Arabian records dating back to the time of Muhammad that it was ever used as a personal name in the early centuries of Islam. It almost certainly came into popular use *as a result of* this text of the Qur’an.

It is more probable that the actual form of the word in Surah 61.6, *ahmadu*, was a simple adjective in the Arabic language of the time. This is supported by the fact that, in the sayings of Jesus we have considered, a proper name of the coming comforter is entirely omitted.

It is also very interesting to note that in one of the early codices of the Qur’an which Uthman ordered to be burnt, namely that of the expert reciter Ubayy ibn Ka’b, Surah 61.6 read somewhat differently. He omitted the conclusion “his name will be Ahmad” (*ismuhu ahmad*) and in its place records Jesus as saying that he was announcing a prophet who would bear the seal of Allah from his prophets and messengers (*khatumullaahu bihil-anbiyaa’ wal-rusuli*).

From a Christian perspective Surah 61.6 is an attempt to modify the prophecy of Jesus about the coming of the Holy Spirit to apply it instead to the Prophet of Islam. Some centuries before his time a counterfeit messiah named

Mani also tried to apply the prophecy to himself and it seems that it was well known in the vicinity of Arabia during the centuries following the time of Jesus. It would only be natural for someone like Muhammad, believing he was the last of the messengers of Allah, to want to secure it in some deliberate way for himself - hence the adaptation of the title into the name *Ahmad* in the Qur’an.

## 5.6 The Holy Spirit: The Promised Comforter

**Muslim:** *You cannot deny that Jesus did speak specifically of another messenger of God to follow him. As he was only one of a long line of prophets and apostles sent by God, is it not surely logical to assume that the Comforter was to be Muhammad?*

In discussion with Muslims on this subject it is useful to take just one of the four sayings of Jesus about the coming Comforter, and to show from it that he could only have been speaking of the Holy Spirit. At the same time a healthy witness can be given to just how the Holy Spirit brings true believers into a relationship of personal unity with God himself. The ideal text for this purpose is this one:

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. *John 14. 16-17*

There are a number of reasons why this passage can only apply to the Holy Spirit and not to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.

## Another Comforter: The Spirit of Truth

By applying sound principles of interpretation to this passage we will find at least seven reasons for concluding that the promised Comforter was the divine Holy Spirit who Jesus promised would come to his disciples shortly after his ascension to heaven.

### 1. He will give you Another Comforter

Jesus specifically told his disciples that he would send the promised Comforter to *them*. He repeated the promise later by saying “I will send him to *you*” (*John 16.7*). Thus the coming of the Spirit of Truth, also specifically declared to be the Holy Spirit (*John 14.26*), was something the disciples of Jesus were to expect in their time and environment. Muhammad only appeared six centuries later.

## 2. He will give you *Another Comforter*

If, as Muslims claim, the original title was *periklutos*, then the sentence would have read “He will give you another praised one”. It not only makes no sense but is completely out of context. What Jesus is saying here is simply: “I have been your comforter, your counsellor and adviser. I have yet many things to teach you, but I will send you *another* counsellor and guide like me”. He had come from God as a spirit from heaven and had taken human form for the duration of his short life on earth. He would send another spirit from above to fulfil his ministry to his followers.

The Qur’an interestingly confirms that Jesus came from God, calling him a “spirit from him” (*ruhun-minhu*), a title given to no other human being in the book (*Surah 58.22*). In the only other instance where the Qur’an speaks of a *ruhun-minhu*, it speaks of a spirit whom God sends into the hearts of true believers to strengthen them - precisely who the Holy Spirit is. So the Qur’an agrees that there were only two spirits whom God has ever sent from himself into the world, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, each one a *paracletos*, a guide and mentor, to comfort and lead the true followers of God on earth.

## 3. To be With You *Forever*

When Muhammad came to the fore as the Prophet of Islam in Arabia in the 7th century after Christ he did not stay with his companions forever but died at the age of 62 years. He was buried in Medina where his body has lain for nearly fourteen centuries. Jesus stated that the promised Comforter, however, would be with his disciples *forever* and the Holy Spirit has done just that, living in the hearts of all true followers of Jesus to this day.

## 4. The Spirit of Truth whom the World Cannot Receive

The Qur’an says that Muhammad came as a universal messenger to all mankind (*Surah 34.28*). Muslims believe that one day the whole world will submit to Islam and become followers of their Prophet. If so Jesus could not have been speaking about him for he declared that the world as a whole cannot receive the Spirit of Truth. Only the true followers of Jesus, who turn to him as their Saviour and Lord, can be born anew of the Holy Spirit and become heirs of eternal life.

## 5. You Know Him

It is quite obvious from this statement that Jesus’ disciples already knew the Spirit of Truth. As Muhammad was only born more than five hundred years later it could not have been him. The Comforter was a *Spirit* with whom

the disciples were already familiar. The next clause states precisely how he was already known to them.

## 6. He dwells *With You*

When Jesus first came to John the Baptist to be baptised by him at the very beginning of his ministry, the heavens were opened and John himself records what happened next:

I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on who you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit’. *John 1. 32-33*

The Spirit of Truth was at all times in the person of Jesus himself, and in this manner the disciples of Jesus had already come to know him. At no time could Muhammad have been said to have already been with Jesus’ disciples.

## 7. He Will be *In You*

As the Spirit was already in Jesus, so it would also enter into and be forever present in the hearts of Jesus’ disciples once he had returned to heaven. This happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who heard the Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus for the first time. God’s love continues to be poured into the hearts of those who turn in faith to Jesus through the same Holy Spirit given to them (*Romans 5.5*). The Greek word here is *en*, meaning “right inside you”. The promise clearly cannot refer to Muhammad who has never entered personally into the hearts of all true Christian believers.

Christians can not only easily refute Muslim arguments in favour of Muhammad as the promised Comforter but, as you can surely see, have at this point an excellent base to witness effectively to Muslims.

# Chapter Six

## The Gospel of Barnabas

### The Spurious Gospel in Islamic Apologetics

#### 6.1 Muslim Interest in the Gospel of Barnabas

*Muslim:* Why has the Christian world hidden the Gospel of Barnabas? This illuminating book proves that Jesus was a true Prophet of Islam, proving that he never claimed to be the Son of God and that he predicted the coming of our Prophet by name.

In witness with Muslims a Christian evangelist will often find that they raise the subject of the **Gospel of Barnabas**. With great confidence they will claim that it is the only reliable record of the life of Jesus Christ and that we have deliberately concealed it because it shows Jesus to have been the prophet the Qur'an declares him to have been. If you should express surprise to hear that such a book actually exists they will press home their contentions all the more, declaring that your ignorance of the book is a sure sign that the Church has forcefully suppressed its teaching.

#### The History of the Barnabas Gospel

In his *Preliminary Discourse* to his translation of the Qur'an first published in 1734 AD, **George Sale** first drew the attention of the Christian world generally to a Gospel attributed to St. Barnabas which, he said, records the life of Jesus in a manner very different from that found in the four Biblical Gospels but corresponding to the traditions of Muhammad in the Qur'an. He mentioned a Spanish translation in the possession of the Moriscoes in Africa (which no longer exists apart from a few known extracts), and an Italian translation in the

library of Prince Eugene of Savoy. From this edition Lonsdale and Laura Ragg published a translation into English which was published in 1907 with various notes, proving Sale's contention that it is a forgery.

Since the beginning of this century, when an Arabic translation became well known in the Islamic world, Muslim scholars and writers have made much of the book. In 1973 the Ragg's English translation of the Gospel was first published in the Muslim world. Since then approximately 100 000 copies have been printed in Pakistan. It has caused considerable excitement as it appears to finally prove, from Christian origins, that Jesus was the 'Isa of Islam and that Muhammad was indeed to be the final messenger of God to all mankind.

Muslims fondly suppose that this Gospel has been denounced in the Christian world solely because of its Islamic character. It is truer to say that this is the only real reason why it has attracted so much publicity in the Muslim world. The external and internal evidences around the book give a far better reason for rejecting it. They prove conclusively that it was compiled only a few centuries ago as a deliberate forgery to impose both Qur'anic and traditional Muslim dogmas on the life of Jesus as it is described in the four genuine Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Unlike these books which are between twenty and forty pages each, the Gospel of Barnabas is 273 pages long.

Much of its teaching is repetitive of Biblical teaching, though adapted to suit Islamic preferences. For example, when ten lepers were healed on one occasion by Jesus, the only one to return was a **Samaritan** who fell at his feet, giving him thanks (*Luke 17.16*). The Gospel of Barnabas conveniently states that he was an **Ishmaelite!** The rest of its teaching, however, consists of legendary and fanciful stories and forged teachings of Jesus of no historical value at all. Let us consider a few of its typical Islamic teachings.

## Islamic Teachings of the Barnabas Gospel

### 1. Jesus Denied that he was the Son of God

The Gospel of Barnabas repeats the incident where Jesus asked his disciples, firstly, who the multitudes thought he was and, secondly, who they thought he was (*Matthew 16.13-20*). When Peter answered that he was the **Son of God**, Jesus responded that he was blessed because his Father in heaven had revealed this to him. In the Gospel of Barnabas, however, while Peter is correctly recorded as declaring that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the answer of Jesus to him was totally different.

Jesus is supposed to have declared to Peter "Begone and depart from me, because thou art the devil and seekest to cause me offence!" He then is reputed to have told all his disciples to beware because "I have won from God a great curse against those who believe this" (*Gospel of Barnabas*, para 70).

### 2. Judas was Crucified in Place of Jesus

The Muslim doctrine that Jesus was taken alive from the earth just before he was due to be arrested while someone else was made to look like him and was crucified in his place is repeated in this Gospel, only it specifically makes the victim **Judas Iscariot**. It was only some centuries after Muhammad that the Muslim world first taught this theory, invented to justify the crucifixion of a bystander who might otherwise have seemed to be an innocent substitute.

The Gospel of Barnabas teaches that when Judas arrived with soldiers to arrest Jesus, God sent four angels to take Jesus out of the world into the third heaven while Judas "was so changed in speech and in face to be like Jesus" that Barnabas and the other disciples believed him to actually be Jesus (*Gospel of Barnabas*, para 216). Judas was duly crucified in his place.

### 3. Jesus Predicted the Coming of Muhammad by Name

In many places Jesus is said to have declared the coming of Muhammad by name, as in this statement made after he said he would first have to endure the infamy that he had been crucified: "But when **Mohammed** shall come, the sacred messenger of God, that infamy shall be taken away" (*Gospel of Barnabas*, para 112).

These are some of the central Islamic features of the Gospel of Barnabas where its teaching contradicts the contents of the four Biblical Gospels. Numerous other Islamic influences can be found throughout the book, such as the claim that the covenantal promise to Abraham was made in Ishmael and not Isaac (para 191), explaining the Muslim conviction that this is the only true Gospel.

## 6.2 Medieval Origins Proving it is a Forgery

**Muslim:** *Among the books discredited by the Gelasian Decree in the sixth century after Christ was the Gospel of Barnabas. This proves that it existed at that time. It was only rejected because it told the truth about Jesus' life and teaching.*

There were numerous apocryphal Gospels, Epistles and other forgeries similar in style to the authentic New Testament scriptures that were rejected by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and in the subsequent *Decretum Gelasianum* of which one was titled the **Gospel of Barnabas**. No historical record whatsoever exists to show what sort of book it was or what it taught. From a study of the contents of this Islamic Gospel so strongly promoted in the Muslim world, however, it soon becomes obvious that these two cannot possibly be the same works. There are many proofs that the latter is a 16th century forgery.

## Medieval Sources of the Gospel of Barnabas

It is not hard to prove to Muslims that this Gospel was first compiled many centuries after the times of *both* Jesus and Muhammad. Three of examples of medieval influences will be considered here.

### 1. The Centenary Year of Jubilee

One of the laws Moses gave to the people of Israel was that a jubilee year was to observed twice every century when slaves would be liberated and debts cancelled. God ordained it in these words:

A jubilee year shall that fiftieth year be to you. *Leviticus 25.11*

About 1300 AD **Pope Boniface the Eighth** decreed that the jubilee year should be reintroduced but that it should only be held at the turn of each century, that is, once every *hundred* years. After his death, however, **Pope Clemens the Sixth** decreed that the jubilee year should revert to every *fifty* years following the Biblical decree and there was talk thereafter of reducing it further. In the Gospel of Barnabas this saying is attributed to Jesus:

And then through all the world will God be worshipped, and mercy received, insomuch that the year of jubilee, which now cometh every hundred years, shall by the Messiah be reduced to every year in every place. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 82*

The anachronism is obvious - the author of the Gospel of Barnabas could only have spoken of the jubilee year coming every hundred years if he knew of the decree of Pope Boniface. Whoever wrote this Gospel makes Jesus repeat a proclamation which was only made at least thirteen centuries after his time! This proves that the Gospel is a forgery of not earlier than the 14th century AD.

### 2. Quotations from Dante's Inferno

Dante was an Italian who lived at about the same time as Pope Boniface. He wrote a well-known classic titled **Divina Comedia** - the "Divine Comedy". It was a fantasy about hell, purgatory and heaven according to the beliefs of his time. Many passages in the Gospel of Barnabas show a dependence on his work, one of which is a saying attributed to Jesus of the prophets of old:

Readily and with gladness they went to their death, so as not to offend against the law of God given by Moses his servant, and go and serve false and lying gods. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 23*

The expression *dei falsi e lugiardi* (false and lying gods) is found elsewhere in the Gospel of Barnabas. Jesus is recorded as again using this phrase (*para 78*) while Herod is also said by the author to have "adored the false and lying gods" (*para 217*). The cliché is found in neither the Bible nor the Qur'an but is a direct quote from Dante! (*Inferno 1.72*).

In its actual descriptions of heaven and hell the Gospel of Barnabas follows Dante exactly while contradicting the Qur'an. Jesus is said to have declared to Simon Peter:

Know ye therefore that hell is one, yet hath seven centres one below another. Hence, even as sin is of seven kinds, for as seven gates of hell hath Satan generated it: so there are seven punishments therein. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 135.*

Dante gives precisely this description in the fifth and sixth cantos of his *Inferno*. Speaking of the heavens the Gospel of Barnabas states that they are *nine* and that Paradise itself is greater than all of them together (*para 178*). This again parallels Dante who also speaks of nine heavens with an Empyrean, a tenth heaven above them all. These depictions of heaven, however, directly contradict the Qur'an which teaches that after Allah had created the earth, he fashioned paradise as seven heavens (*Surah 2.29*).

### 3. The Medieval Environment of the Gospel

Other passages from the Gospel show that the author was more at home in the **climate** and **seasons** of southern Europe than in the land of Palestine. He makes Jesus speak of how beautiful the world is in summer-time when the harvest and fruit abound (*para 169*). This is a fair description of Italy in summer but not of Palestine where the rain falls in winter and the fields are parched in summer.

Likewise the Gospel of Barnabas speaks of storing wine in **wooden wine-casks** (*para 152*), a common practice in medieval Europe but not in first-

century Palestine where wine was stored in **skins** (*Matthew 9.17*). Further proof of the author's ignorance of the geography of Palestine is found in this statement:

Having arrived at the city of Nazareth the seamen spread through the city all that Jesus had wrought. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 20*

In this passage Nazareth is represented as a harbour on the Lake of Galilee. After this Jesus is said to have gone "up to Capernaum". Every disciple of Jesus would have known that **Capernaum** was the city on the shores of the lake while **Nazareth** is up in the hills. Jesus would have gone up from Capernaum to Nazareth, not the other way around as the Gospel of Barnabas has it.

These evidences all prove that the Gospel of Barnabas is a forgery compiled in southern Europe sometime around the 16th century after Christ. Let us proceed to examine other evidences that discount the authenticity of this book that calls itself a Gospel.

### 6.3 Other Evidences Against its Authenticity

**Muslim:** *The Gospel of Barnabas must be the true Gospel since it teaches that Jesus was not to be the final messenger of God to mankind but that this honour would be reserved to our holy Prophet Muhammad who he said would follow after him.*

There are numerous other evidences against the authenticity of the Gospel of Barnabas, some of which derive from the very passages where Jesus is said to have foretold the coming of Muhammad. It is very interesting to note that this Gospel makes no mention of John the Baptist - a striking omission, considering the attention given to him as a contemporary prophet to Jesus in the Biblical Gospels. Instead sayings of John are attributed to Jesus, such as "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" (*John 1.23*) which is ascribed to Jesus in the Gospel of Barnabas together with the whole conversation that surrounds it (*para 42*). The author of this Gospel conveniently, but very erroneously, makes Jesus say of Muhammad what John actually said of him.

### The Messiah - Jesus or Muhammad?

John the Baptist denied that he was the Messiah when challenged by the Jewish leaders (*John 1.20*). The Gospel of Barnabas makes Jesus deny the

same thing in much the same words:

Jesus confessed and said the truth: 'I am not the Messiah ... I am indeed sent to the house of Israel as a prophet of salvation; but after me shall come the Messiah'. *Gospel of Barnabas, paras 42,82*

Who was to be the coming Messiah, then? Elsewhere the Gospel makes Jesus say "The name of the Messiah is Admirable ... God said: Wait Mohammed; for thy sake I will to create paradise ... Mohammed is his blessed name" (*para 97*). Here the author of the Gospel of Barnabas completely overreaches himself for the **Qur'an** clearly states, no less than *eleven* times, that **Jesus** alone is the Messiah. The **Bible** confirms this too on many occasions (*John 4.26, Matthew 16.20*) and one quotation from the Qur'an will be sufficient to prove the point:

O Mary! Lo! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the hereafter. *Surah 3.45*

The title here is **Al-Masih**, "the Messiah", and Jesus himself is called **Al-Masih Isa**, "the Messiah Jesus", elsewhere in the book (*Surah 4.171*). So the Gospel of Barnabas incontrovertibly *contradicts* the Qur'an when it declares that Muhammad was to be the Messiah. No Muslim can be true to his own holy book while at the same time trying to defend the Gospel of Barnabas as an authentic Gospel.

What is very interesting here is the discovery that this Gospel not only contradicts the Qur'an but also *itself*. In the prologue to the book it speaks of "Jesus the Nazarene, called Christ" and states that it is the "true Gospel of Jesus, called Christ". The author does not seem to have been aware that **Messiah** and **Christ** are interchangeable terms, meaning the same thing. The latter derives from the Greek word *Christos* which is a translation of the original Hebrew word *Mashiah*.

### Contradictions Between the Barnabas Gospel and the Qur'an

There are other contradictions between the Qur'an and the Gospel of Barnabas which cannot be satisfactorily explained. One relates to the **birth of Jesus** as it is told in each book. The Gospel says this about the moment of his delivery:

The virgin was surrounded by a light exceeding bright and brought forth her son without pain. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 3*

This statement has no Biblical equivalent but parallels Catholic beliefs of the Middle Ages. It is further evidence that the Gospel of Barnabas is a forgery composed up to fifteen centuries after the time of Christ. What is significant for Muslims, however, is that it totally disagrees with the Qur'an which says of Mary and the birth of Jesus:

And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm tree.  
*Surah 19.23*

There is little room here for Muslims to maintain their cherished belief that they have, in the Gospel of Barnabas, an original Gospel which is consistent with the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. It is not surprising that many Muslim scholars have, in recent times, rejected the Gospel as a forgery. Nonetheless there are still many Muslim writers, often well aware of the overwhelming evidences against it, who still promote it as an authentic text.

Another typical contradiction between the two books is found in the statement in the Gospel of Barnabas about the **angels of God** on the last days before the great Judgment: "The fifteenth day the holy angels shall die, and God alone shall remain alive" (*para 53*). The Qur'an knows nothing about the death of angels but states that eight of them shall bear the throne of Allah on the Last Day (*Surah 69.17*).

Again the Gospel of Barnabas states that on the thirteenth day of the final period before the end, all mankind will die and every living thing on the earth shall perish (*para 53*) whereas the Qur'an states that men will be alive until the last day, the great Day of Judgment, when the trumpet shall sound and "every man will have enough concerns on that day to make him heedless of others" (*Surah 80.37*).

In witness with Muslims it should be easy to get the Gospel of Barnabas dispensed with once these evidences are produced to them. The book is a counterfeit of no value which has been promoted by Muslims as a red herring across the path of genuine Christian-Muslim apologetics.

## 6.4 The Original Authorship of the Gospel

**Muslim:** *Barnabas was known to have been one of the great disciples of Jesus. How can you even contemplate trying to discredit a Gospel written by him? If he was one of the twelve, why do you Christians conveniently reject everything he wrote?*

One of the great questions about this Gospel is indeed its original authorship. Who wrote it? Although it is obvious that the book is a forgery of relatively recent times it is important nonetheless to prove to Muslims that **Barnabas** could never have been its author. Throughout the book its author is said to have been one of the twelve disciples of Jesus yet it is well known that the real Barnabas only appears on the scene *after* the death and resurrection of Jesus and, furthermore, that he only received his name as a result of an incident that took place *much later*. The evidence is found in the following passage:

Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.  
*Acts 4.36-37*

It was only when this man Joseph encouraged the early Church by donating the proceeds of the sale of his property to the disciples of Jesus that he was given the surname *bar-nabas*. Thereafter he is a prominent personality in the record of the initial development of the Church and is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (*Galatians 2.9*). He was most certainly not one of the original twelve, however, whose names are all recorded in two of the Gospels (*Matthew 10.2-4, Luke 6.14-16*). He is not mentioned at all in the four Gospels and the composer of this forgery has, as it were, left his fingerprints on its text by including what is a glaring anachronism. Jesus is said to have called him by name on numerous occasions of which the following passage is an example:

Jesus answered: 'Be not sore grieved, Barnabas, for those whom God hath chosen before the creation of the world shall not perish'.  
*Gospel of Barnabas, para 19*

Such an address *before* Jesus ascended to heaven was impossible if he only received the title some time *after* the event.

## The Probable Authorship of the Barnabas Gospel

There are some evidences that give rise to the probable authorship of this book. In the introduction to the **Spanish** version of the Gospel there was a statement that it was a translation of the Italian version done by an Arragonian Muslim named Mostafa de Aranda. Sale also adds a note that in the preface to the Italian version a certain **Fra Marino**, a Roman Catholic monk, is said to have heard of the existence of the Gospel of Barnabas and happened to come upon it while looking through the library of Pope Sixtus V who was conveniently asleep in his presence. The story concludes with the monk quietly removing the book and converting to Islam once he had read through it.



Whoever the author was it is clear that he was very conversant with the land of Spain and its environment. He could well have been a Spanish Muslim forcibly converted to Christianity around the time of the Spanish Inquisition who took private revenge by compiling an Islamic Gospel. He might well have written it first in Italian to give it a more authentic appearance before translating it into his own language. There is clear evidence of Spanish influence in this quote attributed to Jesus:

For he would get in change a piece of gold must have sixty mites.  
*Gospel of Barnabas, para 54*

The Italian version divides the golden **denarius** into sixty **minuti**. These coins were of Spanish origin dating from the pre-Islamic Visigothic period and betray a Spanish influence behind the Gospel.

It is far more likely that the author was Fra Marino himself as there is also much evidence that the book was written by someone very familiar with Italy and its language. From other works it is known that the real **Fra Marino** was at one time a close associate of Fra Peretti who was a key figure in the Inquisition and later duly became **Pope Sixtus V**. As a result of certain malpractices in his administration as an inquisitor Fra Marino fell out of favour with Fra Peretti and received no further promotion. Peretti, however, went on from one distinction to the other until he obtained the papacy itself.

His fate at the hand of Peretti once he became Pope may have led him to compose this Gospel as an act of private revenge against him, especially if he had subsequently converted to Islam. There is much support for this theory in the story that, while in audience with the Pope, he found the original manuscript in the papal library while the Pontiff dozed off. Conveniently it just happened to be the first book he laid hands on. Muslims today often claim, pursuant to this fictional episode, that the Popes of Rome have always deliberately concealed the Gospel of Barnabas from public knowledge in an act of calculated conspiracy against its contents. It is far more probable that Fra Marino himself, or someone familiar with these gentlemen, composed the manuscript and invented the story of its supposed “discovery”.

We will never know for certain who actually wrote this Gospel. What we do know is that it most certainly could *not* have been written by the Apostle Barnabas who was at no time one of the immediate disciples of Jesus. If the Gospel of Barnabas serves any purpose it is perhaps to prove that it is impossible to compose a life of Jesus consistent with the factual evidences of his life and teachings as found in the four true Gospels which at the same time promotes him as a prophet of Islam. The book fails dismally in its attempt to do precisely this.

In conversation with Muslims it is important to dispose of this Gospel as soon as possible. It offers no useful contribution to the field of Christian-Muslim apologetics.

## 6.5 Paul and Barnabas in the Book of Acts

**Muslim:** *In his Gospel Barnabas expressly repudiates the teaching of Paul that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact even the New Testament records that Paul and Barnabas couldn't agree. It was because Barnabas taught the ultimate truth about Jesus.*

The **Gospel of Barnabas** begins with a statement that “many, being deceived of Satan, under pretence of piety, are preaching most impious doctrine, calling Jesus Son of God ... among whom Paul also hath been deceived” (*para 1*). At the very end of the book **Paul** is again accused of being deceived for the same reason. Muslims latch on to a passage in the Bible where it is recorded that “there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other” (*Acts 15.39*) to prove that Paul and Barnabas could not agree with each other and claim that this is proof that Barnabas differed with Christianity's foremost apostle on the major points of Christian doctrine. The aim is to prove that Barnabas rejected these beliefs and wrote his Gospel to correct them.

### Barnabas and Paul: Two Close Companions

Anyone reading through Acts 15 will discover that the only point of disagreement between these two men was on whether they should again be accompanied by **John Mark** on a later journey. Paul did not want him to go with as he had let them down on their first missionary journey (*Acts 13.13*). For this reason *alone* they separated. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus while Paul chose Silas as his future companion (*Acts 15.39-40*).

All the other evidences in the Book of Acts prove that, far from being an opponent of Paul, **Barnabas** consistently stood by him and backed his teaching. When Paul was converted through a dramatic vision of Jesus in the sky as he made his way to Damascus, he remained a few days in the city with the other disciples of the Lord and then finally entered the local synagogue, proclaiming Jesus and declaring “He is the Son of God” (*Acts 9.20*). There can be no doubt, therefore, that right from the time he first became a follower of Jesus Christ Paul declared the heart of the Christian doctrine. From here it is important to know what role Barnabas played in accompanying him on his travels.

### 1. Barnabas First Introduced Paul to the Other Apostles

When Paul first returned to Jerusalem after his conversion the other disciples were very afraid of him, knowing his relentless persecution of the early Church. They did not believe that he was a true disciple of Jesus. It is a revelation to discover, in the light of the vehement attacks made on Paul in the Barnabas Gospel, just who it was who commended him to the disciples:

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

*Acts 9.27*

From here on, until their dispute on a personal matter, Paul and Barnabas were constantly together. In fact, as we shall see, the real author of the Gospel of Barnabas could hardly have made a more inappropriate choice for the authorship of his forgery.

### 2. Barnabas Sought Paul to help him Teach in Antioch

As soon as the Church in Jerusalem heard that the Church in Antioch was growing well, the Apostles sent **Barnabas** there to instruct the new disciples in the faith of Jesus. Barnabas, however, decided he could not do this alone. Who did he send for to assist him? No one else but **Paul!** He went all the way to Tarsus to look for him and, when he found him, he brought him to Antioch (*Acts 11.25-26*). What follows is significant:

For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

*Acts 11.26*

Under the ministry of these two men the believers were first called **Christians** because Paul and Barnabas taught them the basic truths of what makes Christianity the religion it is today - that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for our sins. These are the very things that the Gospel of "Barnabas" is at such pains to deny. Throughout their travels together Paul took the initiative in preaching the Christian Gospel while Barnabas stood by him, vindicating everything he said. There can be no doubt that Barnabas was not the author of the anti-Paul Gospel attributed to him.

### 3. Both Barnabas and Paul Rejected Circumcision

According to the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus is recorded as teaching that **circumcision** is one of the most important acts of religious piety. Both Judaism and Islam to this day faithfully observe the ordinance. Jesus is supposed to have said:

Leave fear to him that hath not circumcised his foreskin, for he is deprived of paradise. *Gospel of Barnabas, para 23.*

It is most ironic to find that the real Barnabas joined Paul in vehemently opposing circumcision as a necessary ritual for salvation:

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. *Acts 15.1-2.*

In one of his Epistles Paul states that, when he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, they took Titus, an uncircumcised Greek believer in Jesus, as a test case. Paul laid before the apostles the Christian Gospel he was preaching - one devoid of the legalistic rituals that characterise Judaism and Islam - to see if they disagreed with him on any point. They not only agreed that Titus should not be circumcised (*Galatians 2.1-3*) but "gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship" (v.9). It does appear that no one was closer to Paul in his preaching of the Christian faith than this man Barnabas. He cannot possibly be the author of the Gospel falsely attributed to him.

The Gospel of Barnabas is a book of no true historical value. Muslims should be gently persuaded to put it aside and instead take time to read the four genuine Gospels where the real truth about Jesus has been written.

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