



Answering Missionary Allegations Against the Qur'an's Preservation

By Bassam Zawadi

Evangelical missionary Christians, in a vain attempt to divert Muslims from raising criticism against the textual integrity of the Bible, have resorted to a 'and you as well' argument, by claiming that the Qur'an has had corrupted and changed like the Bible. They base their weak arguments on mistranslations of Arabic historical books, misquotations of hadith, deliberate misunderstandings and weak/fabricated narrations. We hope that this small leaflet will equip you, the reader, with answers to some of the fallacious arguments they commonly use regarding the preservation of the verses of the Qur'an, and their compilation under one physical cover (i.e. Uthman's codex).

Were Qur'anic verses lost forever during the battle of Yamama?

Missionaries like to cite a report that is mentioned in *Kitaab Al-Masaahif* for Abu Bakr Ibn Abi Dawud, which states that many memorizers of the Qur'an were killed during the Battle of Yamama, and no one else knew the verses of the

Qur'an that they had memorized, nor were they written down.

Missionaries point to this tradition to try to illustrate that chunks of the Qur'an have been lost forever, however this report is of doubtful authenticity.

- The collector of this report – Abu Bakr Ibn Abi Dawud – was so well known for his dishonesty and unreliability in collection of traditions to the extent that his very own father Abi Dawud called him a “**liar**”. (See Al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-huffaz*, Volume 2, page 302)
- The chain of transmission of this report has an unreliable narrator Yunus ibn Yazeed known for making major mistakes, and furthermore, the chain also has a gap, which means we do not know who transmitted it during this gap.
- The same story has been narrated in earlier and more reliable sources (see Saheeh Bukhari, Book 61, hadith no. 509) where we see that there was no loss of any Qur'anic verses. Rather the companions of the Prophet only feared verses of the Qur'an becoming lost *if* further deaths occurred after Yamama and NOT that the verses were lost already.
- There are authentic and reliable sources that testify that all Qur'anic passages were written down during the Prophet's time each time they were revealed (see Musnad Ahmad, Volume 1, page 92, no. 401 & Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 3, no. 785), hence there existed no verses of the Qur'an without a written counter-part.

- We already know from many narratives, that people like Zaid ibn Thaabit already had memorized the entire Qur'an, and did not die in the Battle of Yamama.

Was there not a general agreement regarding the reliability of the 'Uthmanic Codex?

There was a unanimous consensus from every single Muslim living during 'Uthman's time that the contents of his texts were perfectly portraying the preserved Qur'an.

Ali (ra), the Prophet's paternal cousin, son-in-law, major companion and fourth Caliph, assures us that there was a consensus in agreement regarding 'Uthman's actions, Ali (ra) said:

“By Allah, he did not do what he did regarding the Qur'an, except by agreement from us.” (Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani in *Fathul Baari*, Volume 8, page 634 said that Ibn Abi Dawud collected this statement using an authentic chain of narrators)

The companions of the Prophet (pbuh) all eventually agreed with 'Uthman's burning of the manuscripts. Ibn Abi Dawud collected in his *al-Masaahif*, Volume 1, page 45, from Mus'ab bin Sa'd who said:

‘I found overwhelming support for 'Uthman's (compilation) from the people, however it surprised them, but none rebuked him for it’. (Ibn Kathir quoted it in *Fada'il al-Qura'an* p. 39 and said that its isnad is sahih.)

German Orientalist Theodor Noldeke said:

‘when we consider all this, we must regard it as a strong testimony in favor of 'Uthman's Qur'an that no party – including that of Ali - repudiated the text formed by Zaid, who was one of the most devoted adherents of

'Uthman and his family...' (Nöldeke, Theodor. "The Qur'an," *Sketches from Eastern History*. Trans. J.S. Black. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.)

Did Ibn Mas'ud reject the 'Uthmanic codex (compilation of the Qur'an)?

The answer is no. Ibn Mas'ud's reading has been transmitted down to us through three different routes and they are in perfect harmony with the 'Uthmanic codex. We also pointed out that there was a consensus regarding the acceptance of the 'Uthmanic codex amongst the companions. However, some critics put forth arguments in order to attempt to show otherwise.

One narration that is put forth is the following with its (incorrect) English translation:

'O you Muslim people! Avoid copying the Mushaf and recitation of this man. By Allah! When I accepted Islam he was but in the loins of a disbelieving man'--meaning Zaid bin Thabit--and it was regarding this that Abdullah bin Mas'ud said: 'O people of Al-Iraq! Keep the *Musahif* that are with you, and conceal them.' (Jami At-Tirmidhi 3104)

The phrase **"avoid copying the Mushaf and recitation of this man"** is a very gross mistranslation. It in fact it states **"I have been exempted (i.e. by 'Uthman) from writing down the Mushaf and it is assigned to a man..."**.

The key Arabic word in this narration is *U'zal* (أعزل), which means exempted, isolated, separated, quarantined, etc. If Ibn Mas'ood meant to say "avoid copying the Mushaf", he would have said *I'tazilu* (اعتزلوا) and not follow it with preposition 'an (عن).

Ibn Masud's objection was to decisions made regarding how the Qur'an was being collected but NOT the content of the Qur'an.

Another narration, which Missionaries put forth is the following with its (extremely distorted) English translation:

"The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an. I like it better to read according to the recitation of him (Prophet) whom I love more than that of Zayd Ibn Thabit.". (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p.444)

First of all, this narration is weak because there is a narrator in the chain called Abdul Wahid bin Ziyad, who despite being trustworthy, has problems narrating the hadiths of Al-A'amash who is also in the chain.

Secondly, **and this is the main problem**. The phrase "The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an" **is not to be found in the original Arabic text**.

The Arabic words *فغلوا المصاحف* (*faghullu al-masaahif*) have been falsely translated into "The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an". So what is the accurate translation?

The Arabic word *al-masaahif*, simply means 'manuscripts'. Not a big deal.

The focus is on the word *faghullu*. The translator found this to imply deceit in the text of the Qur'an itself, which is completely false. The word *faghullu* (فغلوا) means to hide. So Ibn Mas'ud was telling the people to hide their manuscripts. He did not say that there is deceit in the manuscripts of 'Uthman. The words from the English translation "in the reading of the Qur'an" do not even exist in the text. This is an

interpretation of the words of Ibn Masud, which has no basis in either translation or context.

Missionaries may argue that they took their translation from a Muslim English translation of Ibn Sa'd (i.e. translation by Syed Moinul Haq back in 1967), but how is that relevant? If the translator was wrong, then he was simply wrong. What's more to say?

Thirdly, even if such a phrase does exist and even if the narration is authentic, we know that Ibn Mas'ud later recanted from this position, for reasons which will be shortly mentioned.

Did Ibn Mas'ud Reject Surahs 1, 113 & 114?

There are two different arguments, which critics raise in this regard. One is the argument about Surah 1 and the other one is about Surahs 113 and 114.

- The argument about Surah 1

First of all, none of the narrations, which we have stated that Ibn Masud did not consider Surah 1 to be part of the Qur'an. The narrations only state that he did not have them written down in his codex.

Secondly, it is highly unlikely to believe that Ibn Mas'ud did not believe that Surah 1 was part of the Qur'an when it is compulsory for every Muslim to recite it as the first Surah in his prayer.

Thirdly, even if Ibn Mas'ud denied Surah 1, his opinion is to be rejected, since Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself said that prayer will be not valid, unless the opening chapter of the Qur'an has been recited (see Saheeh Muslim, Book 4, no.777), which is Surah 1 and he is obviously a much higher authority than Ibn Mas'ud. Hence, we already have a

direct statement from the Prophet (pbuh) himself affirming that Surah 1 belongs in the Qur'an.

- The argument about Surahs 113 & 114

Even if we assume that Ibn Mas'ud did hold to this position at some point in his life, it doesn't mean that he died upon this position. It appears that Ibn Mas'ud's reading was transmitted to us through three different chains (by 'Aasim ibn Hadlah Abi Al Nujood Al Asadi, Hamzah bin Habeeb Al Zayyat & Ali bin Hamzah Al Kisaa'ie) and all of these three readings agree with the 'Uthmanic manuscript:

Ibn Hazm (d. 456 A.H) states:

'And as for their saying that Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's manuscript differs from ours, this is invalid, a lie and slander. Ibn Mas'ud's manuscript has his reading with no doubt, and his reading is the reading of 'Aasim, which is famous amongst everyone who follows Islam from East to West. We read it as we mentioned, just as we read another (i.e. reading) and what is correct is that they are all revealed from Allah All Mighty'. (Ibn Hazm, *Al Fasl Fil Milal wal Ahwaa' wal Nihal*, Volume 2, page 212)

Again like before we have direct proof from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself who stated that Surahs 113 & 114 are Surahs from the Qur'an. Refer to Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 8, No. 1419 & 1457.

Did Ubayy ibn Ka'b Believe in two additional Surahs (Al-Hafd & Al-Khaal)?

Missionaries claim that Ubayy ibn Ka'b believed that they (i.e. Al-Hafd and Al-Khaal) were two additional surahs which were part of the Qur'an. First of all, none of the recorded narrations state that Ubayy believed that were Surahs.

Secondly, these two alleged "Surahs" are known to be supplications (Dua) according to other narrations, which we have.

Thirdly, the companions were known for including texts into their codices even though they didn't believe that they were part of the Qur'an (e.g. Commentary, supplications, footnotes etc). In fact, Muslims still write commentary, supplications and footnotes in their Qur'ans today. But no one confuses those for actual passages of the Qur'an!

If Christian Missionaries should apply this critical argument to their own book, they'll find serious issues like the books the Shephard of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas, were part of one of the earliest discovered bible manuscripts called Codex Sinaiticus, but are now missing from the modern bibles we have today.

Fourthly, Ubayy was part of the committee appointed by 'Uthman and we don't see him arguing that these two alleged Surahs should have been included into the 'Uthmanic text. Surely, if he believed that Al-Hafd and Al-Khaal should have been included into the Qur'an then we would expect to have some record of him disputing this matter with other members in the committee.

Fifthly, we know that Ubayy didn't transmit those additional 'Surahs' to others because he transmitted down his written recording of the Qur'an through the scholars Naafi', Ibn Katheer, Abu Amro and others, of which do not include Al-Hafd and Al-Khaal or any mention of them.

The Claim of references to "Missing" Chapters, Passages, Verses & Phrases in the hadith

In the hadith literature one would find a number of narrations, which state that there was once a so and so verse (or passage, etc.) that the companions used to recite, however when one

looks at the Qur'an today he would realize that we don't have these verses with us anymore.

How do we address such narrations? Well in Islam, Muslims believe in the concept of abrogation.

Abrogation is where Allah (swt) reveals a command and then repeals it for something else, as a Mercy and out of His Wisdom. This is taught in the Qur'an here:

"None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?" Surah 2: 106

Notice how the Qur'anic verse is saying that Allah can make verses become abrogated or even become forgotten. If Allah wills He could have, through divine intervention, made verses become forgotten and then replaced them with others.

Now whether a Christian has theological objections to this belief or not is irrelevant (which would be ironic considering that most Christians believe Jesus/Paul abrogated almost the entire law of Moses!). What matters for Muslims is that the Qur'an has been preserved the way Allah, and His Messenger intended it to be. The same can not be said of the Bible.

In Islam we have three different forms of abrogation.

- 1) Abrogation of the legal ruling of the text, but not its recitation. (e.g. 8:65 is abrogated by the verse that follows it).

- 2) Abrogation of the recitation of the text, but not its legal ruling. (e.g. verse of stoning the adulterer)
- 3) Abrogation of both the ruling and recitation of the text. (e.g. verses on 10 and 5 suckles and whether they result in forbidding marriage between the one being suckled and the one suckling)

Here we are dealing with type 2 and type 3, which involve abrogating the recitation of one of the verses of the Qur'an. Here Allah has ordained and willed that these verses are to be recited temporarily.

One may ask "What is the wisdom behind abrogating the recitation of a verse, but still upholding its commands?"

This is because the commands were left to the Sunnah for preservation. This would make sense because if the Qur'an preserved the entire record of historical events and commands, it would fill a library and be unwieldy for the average Muslim to read through. So it is left for the Sunnah which preserves a lot of the rules and laws uttered/actioned by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The authority of the Sunnah is established based upon the verse: **"Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger"** (Qur'an 5: 92).

For example, the Qur'an does not tell us the exact method of prayer, nor how many rakahs each prayer carries, so we rely on revealed commandments which are in the Sunnah. It should be noted, that Sunnah narrations which are definitely authentic carry equal authority to the Qur'an (but not equality in holiness).

One may ask "What is the wisdom behind abrogating both the recitation and injunction of a Qur'anic verse?" (e.g. verse on ten suckles).

Answer: Allah with His great wisdom gave only the early generation of Muslims specific Qur'anic commands were not meant to be a permanent ruling for all Muslim generations to come.

Did Ibn 'Umar admit a loss of parts of the Qur'an?

The following tradition is attributed to Ibn 'Umar:

"Let none of you say, 'I have learned the whole of the Qur'an,' for how does he know what the whole of it is, when much of it has disappeared? Let him rather say, 'I have learned what remains thereof'" (Abu Ubaid, Kitab Fada'il-al-Qur'an).

Ibn 'Umar was talking about the concept of abrogation. Ibn 'Umar is intending to say that no one should say that one has all of the Qur'an that was ever been revealed, since some of the verses were abrogated. Rather, one should only say that we possess only the verses which were not abrogated. This is why Abu 'Ubaid placed this narration under the heading *"What Was Removed From The Qur'an After It's Revelation"* (*ma rufi'a min Al-Qur'an ba'da Nuzoolihi*).

Similarly, Imam Al-Suyuti in his book *Al-Itqaan fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an* puts forth this narration as an illustration of how Islam teaches the concept of recital abrogation.

The claim that a goat ate out the verse about stoning the adulterer from the Qur'an

Some Missionaries falsely claim that a goat 'ate out' a verse from the Qur'an, quoting the following narration:

'It was narrated that Aishah said: "The Verse of stoning and of breastfeeding an adult ten times was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his

death, and a tame goat came in and ate it."
(Sunan ibn Majah 1944)

They insinuate that this tradition (which is not even authentic) demonstrates that the reason why the verse for stoning the Adulterer is not with us in the Qur'an today is because the sheep ate up the paper it was written on. This argument is absurd for the following reasons:

- There is no reason to believe that this was the only piece of paper that had this verse written on it.
- There are hadiths which show the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) refusing to approve the writing down of that verse, due to it being abrogated from the Qur'anic text (to be preserved through the Sunnah). Umar (ra) asked **"O Messenger of Allah, let the verse about stoning be written for me." He (the Prophet) said, 'I can't do this.'**
(Sunan Al-Kubra Baihiqi 8/211 & Sunan Al-Kubra Nasai Hadith 7148. Albani (in Sahiha 6/412) said Baihiqi pointed to its authenticity)
- The companions already had this verse memorized (ref Saheeh Muslim, Book 017, Number 4194). Unless they want to argue that this sheep also "ate the memories" of the companions who memorized those verses, they have no arguments left to advance.

For More Information

For a more in-depth discussion, and for references for further reading, please visit the **Muslim Debate Initiative** website (www.TheDebateInitiative.com) and search for 'Qur'an preservation' to get a number of articles on the topic.