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## Who Corrupted the Gospels?

By Ijaz Ahmad

Evangelical Missionary Christians, have sought to meander away from the topic of Biblical errancy, doctrinal and textual corruption by placing the spotlight on Islam's view of the Gospels. The problem therein would be their use of eisegesis on the Qur'an and Ahadith. Eisegesis can be defined as, "erratic, unscholarly and polemical reinterpretation of scripture through the use of confirmation bias". It is our hope that after having read this, you develop a proper understanding of Islam's view of the Bible and would then be able to refute any polemical claims in this regard.

### Did Muhammad (peace be upon him) Doubt his Prophethood?

Missionaries tend to appeal to Qur'an 10:94 to assert this claim; however an intelligent reading of this verse demonstrates the converse:

"But if you (O Muhammad) are in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, ask those who read the Book before you; certainly the truth has come to you from your Lord, therefore you should not be of the disputers. And you should not be of

those who reject the communications of Allah, (for) then you should be one of the losers."

It is easy to manipulate the meaning of any document, especially when it is not in its original language. Each language has specific idioms, metaphors and similes, those being literary devices which are unique to it and the Qur'an is not an exception to this literary/ language rule.

Professor William D. Barrick of Old Testament studies, states, "Translation of Scripture should be faithful to the original languages of the text, but should also communicate the text's meaning accurately to the modern reader so that he may reach proper theological conclusions." (*The Integration of OT Theology with Bible Translation*, Prof. William Barrick)

It is with that said, that we should now examine what the Arab linguists and the Prophet himself have stated:

- The expression 'if you doubt', does not make it necessary that Muhammad (peace be upon him) doubted. (From the linguistic point of view) Arabs use such expressions, e.g., the master might say to his servant: 'If you are my servant you must do such and such' when the master has no real doubt at all that the servant addressed is his servant. Similarly an Arab might say to his son: 'If you are my son you will be kind to me' (*At-Tabari, Jami'*, vol. II, p. 60)
- Say, "O people, I am a messenger of Allah (sent) to you from the One to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no god but He. He gives life and brings death. So, believe in Allah

and His Messenger, the Ummiyy (unlettered) prophet, who believes in Allah and in His words, and follow him, so that you may find the right path." (*Qur'an 7:158*)

From this, we understand that the Prophet himself never doubted but rather he affirmed his faith in Allah and the revelation given to him. Furthermore, the Arabs perfectly understood the proper meaning of this verse, its rendering, having nothing to do with doubt but rather affirmation of faith.

### Is the Gospel God's Word?

Muslims believe that God revealed scriptures to previous Prophets, we attest to the fact that God revealed the Zabur (Psalms), Torah (Law), Injil (Gospels) and the Scrolls of Abraham. The Qur'an in numerous places states that God's Words cannot be altered in any way by man in Qur'an 3:3-4, 6:115 and 18:27. However we do believe that men wrote words and claimed it to be from God, when indeed it was not from God but from themselves. That is to say they falsified words and then claimed it to be God's Words:

So, woe to those who write the Book with their hands and then say, "This is from Allah", so that they may gain thereby a trifling price. Then, woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn. (*Qur'an 2:79*)

A simple example of this can be demonstrated from the New Testament. While the Bible is considered to be an 'inspired scripture', there are portions of it which claim to be void of God's guidance, direction and inspiration:

Now about virgins: I have *no command from the Lord*, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is

trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. (*1 Corinthians 7:25-26*)

This form of scriptural corruption is something to which even the Bible, attests to having happened according to the Prophet Jeremiah:

"How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? (*Jeremiah 8:8*)

This sentiment being further qualified by Christian scholarship:

The *deceitful pen* of the scribes. They have written falsely, though they had the truth before them. It is too bold an assertion to say that "the Jews have never falsified the sacred oracles;" they have done it again and again. They have written falsities when they knew they were such. (*Adam Clarke's Exegesis, Jeremiah 8:8*)

Which presents a problem as the Bible itself claims to be eternally preserved by YHWH:

Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. (*Psalms 119:89*)

While some Missionary zealots may claim that the Injil is what Allah revealed and therefore it is allegedly the same as the modern Bible, this is an incorrect notion. The Qur'an clearly states that Muslims are to believe that God sent a scripture with Jesus:

We sent 'Isa son of Maryam after those prophets, confirming the Torah that was (revealed) before him, and We gave him the Injil having guidance and light therein, and confirming the Torah that was (revealed) before it; a guidance and a lesson for the God-fearing. (*Qur'an 5:45*)

No Christian believes that Jesus was sent with the New Testament, but that the NT was written and gathered after the ascension of Christ. Therefore, the Muslim and the Christian both refer to two distinct sets of revelation, where one is not the other, as some would have us falsely believe.

Therefore, it is not that God allowed His word to become corrupted or that God Himself corrupted His own words, but that men wrote words and claimed it to be from Him. This was a common occurrence according to Christian theology (see *Jeremiah 8:8*), as God's word was continuously misplaced, one example being that the Torah was rediscovered after 23 years of absence:

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. (*2 Kings 22:8*)

In fact, it is Christ himself in the Bible who condemns the Jews for having killed the Prophets who came to revive the message of God's revelation among the Israelites:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (*Matthew 23:37*)

With all these things having been stated, let us now expound upon some common knowledge of who 'Isa (Jesus – may God be pleased with him) was, what his message was and what Islam states about him.

### **Facts About Prophet Jesus that you Must Know:**

**Fact #1:** Jesus was a messenger of Allah. His purpose was to deliver the holy revelation to the Israelites, guide them and teach them God's message which was the same message of the previous Prophets, see: Qur'an 19:23-33 and 42:13, Bible Acts 2:21-22, Matthew 5:17-20.

**Fact #2:** Jesus, like every Prophet sent by God, had a following, called an Ummah (nation). The Prophet is the Imam (leader) of his nation of followers and they will be judged according to the law which that Prophet taught, as given by God, see: Qur'an 3:52, 5:111, 10:47 and 16:36.

For every people there is a messenger. So, when their messenger comes, the matter is decided between them with justice, and they are not wronged. (*Qur'an 10:47*)

**Fact #3:** Jesus' followers will be superior to the disbelievers who rejected the message of God as brought by him at his time. In Fact #2, it was mentioned that each Prophet was sent with a message (law, revelation). If the people at that time accepted the message or revelation then they would be considered to be better (superior) than the disbelievers who rejected the Prophet and his message, see Qur'an 3:55. We do not consider Christians to be this group, as the religion defined as Christianity today, was not developed/ codified/ canonized until the Ecumenical councils. It should be noted that any ummati (one who belongs to a Prophet's nation) will be superior to the disbelievers of his time, until the Day of Judgment when God will then judge the believer and disbeliever.

At that time, both will be judged against the Law as brought by that particular Prophet.

**Fact #4:** Early Judeo-Christianity, (between 30 AD and 65 AD), was not a monolithic faith. According to the Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, at the least, some 20 groups and more existed at that time claiming to be guided by the disciples and the true message of Christ. In fact, we see Paul being opposed with another Gospel which began to develop a large following:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. (*Galatians 1:6-7*)

Wherein he even claims that the disciples, James, Peter and Barnabus were following a different understanding of Gospel than which he was observing, or the different Gospel from *Galatians 1:6-7* :

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? (*Galatians 2:14*)

Christianity as we know it today, did not exist at the time of the disciples. Even the disciples themselves, scolded Paul and many others who disagreed with them on the teaching of the law. We read in *Acts 15:19-21* that James decides that the Law is fruitful, as opposed to Paul's belief that it was not fruitful, see:

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (*Romans 3:28*)

**Fact #5:** Those who disbelieved in Christ's true message are in doubt according to the Qur'an. Christ's true followers knew that he would not be crucified or killed, but those who did not follow his teachings and message, follow tales of doubt as the Qur'an states:

And for their saying, "We have certainly killed the Masih 'Isa the son of Maryam, the Messenger of Allah", while in fact they did neither kill him, nor crucify him, but they were deluded by resemblance. Those who disputed in this matter are certainly in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it, but they follow whims. It is absolutely certain that they did not kill him. (*Qur'an 4:157*)

Even the Bible says that the disciples doubted and disbelieved in these stories of Jesus reappearing after he had been 'killed':

When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. (*Mark 16:11*)

These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either. (*Mark 16:13*)

One particular verse even alludes to the disciples referring to such an account as being, 'foolish' and 'nonsense' (ληπός):

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. (*Luke 24:11*)

Some might ask, 'why would God allow people to believe such an incident about a Prophet without clarifying the claims?' The Qur'an answers this argument in Surah Ya-Sin (36), in verses 13 to 32, where Allah sent three disciples of Christ to correct the misinformation at that

time and finally He sent Muhammad (peace be upon him) to do the same.

**Fact #6:** Allah made the true believers in Christ to be victorious:

O you who believe, be supporters of (the religion of) Allah, just as 'Isa, son of Maryam, said to the Disciples, "Who are my supporters towards Allah?" The Disciples said, "We are the supporters of (the religion of) Allah." So a group from the children of Isra'il believed, and another group disbelieved. Then We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became victors. (*Qur'an 61:14*)

Some missionaries dishonestly interpret this to mean that whichever group became the most populous or the most followed at that time is the group the Qur'an referred to. Since the group at that time which became most successful was the Roman Church. That would leave half of Christendom out of the equation, those being the Protestant and Orthodox Churches, how strange an interpretation indeed. The proper understanding of this verse is as such:

Different sectors of the general public attached themselves to each one of these (three) groups. The groups clashed with one another. The two of the non-believing groups overpowered the third group, which was a group of true believers. Eventually Allah raised the Final Messenger (peace be upon him) who supported the group of the true believers. This group then dominated the others because of their correct belief and its solid proofs confirmed by the Qur'an. (*Tafsir Maariful Qur'an, pg 444*)

This makes sense, as when God sends another Prophet, that new Prophet supports the

message and belief of the previous Prophets. Hence when Jesus came, he too, took it upon himself to preach the Law of Moses, see Matthew 5:17-20. The disciples in the New Testament themselves, can be found observing and promoting Moses' law during Christ's ministry, in Matthew 26:17,20. The law was practiced during Jesus' burial, Mark 15:42-43, John 19:38-42. The disciples even stayed at home on the Sabbath before returning to his 'tomb', in Matthew 28:1. They continued 14 years after Christ's ascension in Galatians 2:11-14 and made the law compulsory to follow again by James in Acts 15:21. Even though the early Christian population grew larger than the Judaic faith, the true message of practicing God's laws/ mitzvot/ shari'ah was preserved thus making the observers of God's message superior to the disbelievers at that time. Similarly, the Muslims who came after Christ's mission believed in him and his message, therefore they too preserved the truth and thus are superior to those who altered, distorted and perverted the message he delivered.

**Fact #7:** The Qur'an affirms the Message of Jesus. Some Missionary zealots, falsely assert that Qur'an 5:57, 5:68 and 7:157 means that the true Gospel is the Bible at the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him). However upon reading the following verses, this clearly is not the case:

And the people of the Injil must judge according to what Allah has sent down therein. Those who do not judge according to what Allah has sent down, they are the sinners. (Qur'an 5:47)

Rather, in this verse and the previously aforementioned verses, God is condemning the hypocrites who claimed to follow the doctrine of

Christ, yet they did not put the message he brought into practice. That is, they put into abandonment the laws given to Christ by God. As seen in Fact #6, the disciples practiced the law before, during and after Christ's mission, despite later opposition from Paul's group. In these verses the Qur'an is reminding the Christians of this, that Christ never forsook the law and to do so is to delve into sin and disobedience from God's true message.

#### **Points to Consider:**

- Allah did send messengers to correct the misinformation about Christ's true identity, as we read in Qur'an 61:14 and finally He sent Muhammad (peace be upon him) to affirm the Prophethood of Jesus the Christ ('Isa al Masih – may God's peace be upon him).
- Just as the true followers of Christ were a minority during his mission, seeing opposition from the Jews and other zealous sects, God regarded their belief, as opposed to their disbelief and holding to the truth as making them superior to the disbelievers at that time. With the advent of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Muslims also preach and hold to the true identity of Christ, thereby keeping the truth in circulation, thus making the Muslims superior to those who follow misguidance and error.
- The Gospel was preserved by God in the Shari'ah of Muhammad (peace be upon him), just as the Mitzvot of Moses was preserved by the practice of Christ and his disciples.
- Even though men began to follow false claims about Christ, in some aspects many also knew the truth about him.

Some examples we can see in the New Testament are, Acts 2:21-22, John 5:30-31 and Mark 12:29, therefore some of his message was preserved and known by Christians at Muhammad's (peace be upon him) time.

- Allah commanded the Christians to judge by the true laws and prophecies which they knew and still had remnants of during Muhammad's (peace be upon him) time. One example is of Waraqa bin Naufal's acceptance and declaration that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a Prophet due to his extensive knowledge as an Ebionite/ Arian Christian.
- Allah sent the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to correct the heretical Christians and their new found beliefs. Therefore Christ's message is still preserved and superior to the deceptions of the disbelievers.
- Jesus' message allowed for the children of Israel to accept Islam, and promote God's true message throughout the earth, eventually they too accepted Islam, as is testament in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine now being majority Muslim, former majority Christian nations and kingdoms

#### **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](http://www.thedebateinitiative.com)).