

Has the Bible Been Changed?

وَلَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ

There is no one who can change the words of Allah

Does the Muslim have the right to read the Bible?

Have the Jews corrupted the texts of the Bible?

Why did God send several revelations?

Does the Muslim have the right to read the Bible?

Would you agree that we should reject neither Christianity nor Islam based on the words and actions of bad Christians and bad Muslims, those who do not know or do not follow the true teachings of Christianity and Islam? It would be fairer to examine the life and teachings of Jesus or the life and teachings of Muhammad in order to decide whether or not each one of them was sent by God.

The Religion of Our Fathers

Too many people never question the beliefs they have inherited from their parents: they are Christians because their parents were Christians, or they are Muslims because their parents were Muslims. And yet, both Christians and Muslims ask Pagans to reject their idols, their false gods, in spite of the fact that these Pagans inherited them from their parents. If we ask others to examine the religion in which they were born, shouldn't each of us examine the religion into which he or she was born to determine whether or not it is the true one? And shouldn't we take the trouble to go to the source before evaluating the religion of others?

It is always best to avoid basing our conclusions on hearsay. A believer in Christ named

Fouad Masri was speaking to his Muslim friend, Kamal. Fouad asked him:

“‘Kamal, have you read the Injeel?’ He scoffed, ‘No, it’s been changed.’ Fouad countered, ‘Well, if you haven’t read it, how do you know it’s been changed?’ He replied, ‘Well, my dad told me it was.’ Fouad asked him, ‘Did your dad read the Injeel?’ ‘No,’ Kamal responded. ‘So how does he know it’s been changed?’ his friend urged. ‘Well,’ said Kamal, ‘Grandpa told him it was.’ Fouad couldn’t help but ask, ‘Did Grandpa read the Injeel?’ And of course, Kamal replied that his grandfather hadn’t read the Injeel.” (*Connecting With Muslims*).

Misinformation is passed on in this way from generation to generation, without anyone verifying what he is told. Isn’t this dangerous? In spite of the love and respect we have for our parents, we recognize that, like all men, they can be ignorant of certain truths. And so we discover and take advantage of new ways to treat various diseases, to raise crops, to travel from one place to another, to communicate with those who live far away, or to do many other things. Keeping an open mind does not mean we are being disrespectful to our parents or our heritage. By doing so, we may be able to bring a blessing to both ourselves and our families.

Two hundred years ago, the pagan people living on certain islands in the Pacific Ocean were torn by war and violence. One day two men who were traveling by canoe were taken off course by a great storm and ended up far from their destination. After many days they landed on an island called Rarotonga. The chief of the island asked them for news of the island from which they had come. The two men began to explain that great changes were taking place on their home island: all the people were burning their idols. They had all begun worshipping the God of Heaven and Earth instead of their old gods. The chief was astounded. He asked them, “Just what has this ‘God of Heaven and Earth’ given you to cause you to abandon the gods of your fathers?” The travelers answered very simply, “Peace. This God has given us peace.” At this, the chief of Rarotonga ordered his people to pray to the God of Heaven and Earth so that He might send a messenger to them, as well, so that they could worship this God and have peace. In spite of the fact that his ancestors had not known this God, the chief recognized that he and his people needed Him very badly.

Is the Bible Forbidden to Muslims?

Muslims sometimes have the mistaken idea that it is forbidden for them to read or to own a copy of the Bible. If one of their children ac-

quires a Bible, they may beat the child and take away the Bible. If one of their friends is discovered reading a Bible, they treat him as if he is guilty of something terrible or shameful.

They forget that according to one of the Hadith, “The prophet said, Tell the stories of bani-Israel, for it is not a sin to do so.” More importantly, nowhere does the Qur’an itself forbid the reading of the Bible. To the contrary:

The Qur’an says in Surah 2 – *Al-Baqarah*, aya 136, “Say, ‘We believe in God and what was revealed to us; and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the [other] prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them. It is to Him that we surrender ourselves.’” Instead of forbidding the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians, this verse clearly says that the Muslim must grant them the same respect that he gives to the Qur’an. All of these writings would be from the same source and would deserve the same esteem.

The Qur’an says in Surah 4:136 – *An-Nisa*, “Believers, believe in God and His Messenger and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger, as well as what He sent down before. He who denies God, His angels, His

Scriptures, His messengers and the Last Day has surely gone far astray.” It is inconceivable that a faithful Muslim would treat the Bible with contempt, when, according to his own Qur’an, it came down from Allah Himself and all believers are to accept it.

Other passages in the Qur’an speak in the same way:

“Believers, argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, [but contend not at all] with such of them as are unjust. Say, ‘We believe in what has been revealed to us, and what has been revealed to you; our God and your God are one; and to Him we submit.’” (Surah 29:46 – *Al-Ankabut*)

Allah says to Muhammad in Surah 2:4,5 – *Al-Baqarah*:

“Those who believe in the revelation sent down to you and in what was sent before you, and firmly believe in the life to come—they are the people who are rightly following their Lord and it is they who shall be successful.”

And again:

“Say, ‘People of the Book! Do you resent us only because we believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and to others before, and because most of you are disobedient?’” (Surah 5:59 – *Al-Ma’idah*)

How can one claim to believe in what was given by God to Moses and to Jesus, and say at the same time that it is forbidden to read what was revealed them? How can one say, as some claim, that the Qur'an replaces the Bible and makes it useless and unimportant, when the Qur'an itself recommends many times to read both the Qur'an AND the Bible?

Muslims sometimes ask Christians, "Why do you not accept our prophet and our holy book, whereas we recognize not only Muhammad, but also Jesus, Moses and all the prophets of God, as well as what God revealed to them?" The Christian wonders in just what sense the Muslim claims to believe in Jesus, Moses and the other prophets when he refuses to read these revelations, nor does he recognize the right of others to read them.

Has the Bible Been Corrupted?

Many Muslims do not respect the Bible because they believe it has been changed by Jews or Christians, that it has been corrupted and that one can no longer trust it. Some say that God did indeed give the Tawrat (the Torah) of Moses, but the Tawrat was corrupted. Then he gave the Zabur (the Psalms) to David, but the Zabur was corrupted. Next he sent the Injeel (the Gospel) to Jesus, son of Mary, but the Injeel was corrupted. Finally, Allah was forced to give the Qur'an to Muham-

mad. Are they right? Has the true Bible been either changed or taken away altogether?

“There Is No One Who Can Change the Words of Allah”

One believer in Christ says that when someone claims that the Bible has been corrupted, he answers, *Astaghfir ‘allah!* In other words he immediately asks Allah to forgive this person for having blasphemed. A servant of Allah must not lightly say that mere mortal men could do such a thing. After all, we all know that God is All-Powerful. Is He not capable of protecting His own word? Of course He is able! If human beings managed to corrupt the Word of God, then they would be stronger or smarter than God, and we know that is impossible. No, it is unthinkable that God would allow His word to be changed.

Besides, both the Bible and the Qur’an affirm this truth. Jesus said in Mark 13:31, “The heavens and the earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” The prophet Isaiah said, “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6-8). The Qur’an clearly affirms the same thing. Surah 10:64 – *Yunus*: “No change can there

be in the Words of Allah, this is indeed the supreme success.” According to Surah 6:34 – *Al-An’am*, “There is no one who can change the words of God”. Other passages in the Qur’an teach the same truth.

The Qur’an never says it was given because other scriptures from Allah had been changed. It rather suggests that His revelation had not yet reached the Arabic-speaking people in their own language and that for this reason Allah chose Muhammad and entrusted to him the same revelation for his people, but in a way that they could understand. In Surah 41:43,44 – *Fusillat*, Allah says to the prophet, “Nothing is said to you but what was said indeed to the messengers before you; surely your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness but also the Lord of painful retribution. Had We sent this as a Quran [in a language] other than Arabic, they would have said, ‘Why are its verses not clearly explained? What! An Arab Prophet, and a scripture in a foreign tongue?’” Again, in Surah 42:7 – *As-Sura*: “Thus We revealed to you, this Arabic Quran so that you may warn the mother of cities [Makkah] and those around it, and warn them of the Day of Gathering which is sure to come.”

It is clear that the giving of the Qur’an to Muhammad had nothing to do with a so-called corruption of the previous revelations.

Two Kinds of Corruption

In this discussion the Arabic word “Tahrif” is sometimes used; it means that the thing spoken of has been deformed, falsified, or changed from its original state. It is sometimes translated by the word “corrupt.” People do not always realize that there are two kinds of “tahrif”: there is *tahrif-il lafzi* which refers to changing a written text, that is, the text itself. There is also *tahrif-i ma'nawi*, which refers to changing the meaning, or giving false explanations of a text.

In reading the passages of the Qur'an that some people quote to support the idea that the Bible has been corrupted, it can be seen that nearly all of these texts are talking about the second kind of *Tahrif* and do not cast any doubt at all on the authenticity of the text of the Bible as we have it. For example, in Surah 3:78 – Al-Imran, we read, “There are some among them who distort the Book by the way they speak to make you think that what they say is from the Book, whereas it is not. They say it is from God whereas it is not. Thus they tell a lie about God and they know it.” Iman Fakhra al-Din Razi in his commentary on this verse explicitly says that the Jews only committed “Tahrif-I-Manwai” and that the passage does not mean that they altered the sacred text.

People also quote Surah 2:75,77 – *Al-Baqarah*:

“Do you then hope that they will believe in you when some of them have already heard the word of God and then, after having understood it, they knowingly perverted it?... Do they not know that God knows all that they conceal and all that they disclose? There are among them unlettered people who have no real knowledge of the Scriptures.”

Notice that these passages only refer to the Jewish scriptures and not to the Gospel. In addition, they do not speak of changing what was written, but rather of twisting the meaning when one was reading the text aloud or of omitting certain parts and not pronouncing them.

A Worldwide Plot? Really?

There is, on the other hand, a text in the Qur’an which speaks of a sin committed by certain Jews that involved writing. “Woe to those who write the scripture with their own hands, and then declare, ‘This is from God,’ in order to sell it for a paltry price. Woe to them because of what their own hands have written, and woe to them for what they have earned” (Surah 2:79 – *Al-Buqarah*). But do these accusations mean that the Jews were taking an authentic text and altering it

permanently? Let us suppose that a corruption of manuscripts did take place: are we to believe that all the Jews in the world followed those to whom Muhammad spoke in this verse? And if, strangely, the Jews in every other country for some reason accepted the changes made by the group mentioned in this passage of the Qur'an, it is impossible to believe that all Christians around the world accepted these same changes to their sacred texts. Do not forget that Christians also possess the Torah. They, also, have cherished and conserved the books of Moses and of the other prophets for the past two thousand years. One can hardly deduce from this text, which refers to an act committed in the midst of a small Jewish community in a remote place, that this act resulted in the corruption of the Torah, of which the entire Jewish population around the world as well as the Christian population, several times larger, possessed copies. It is simply not a rational conclusion. In addition, as we have already said, none of these Koranic passages speak of a corruption of the Injeel, the New Testament of the Christians.

It is important to know that before the 12th century, that is five hundred years after the time of Muhammad, no Muslim scholar ever suggested that the texts of the Bible had been corrupted. Neither Muhammad nor those referred to as "the rightly guided" put

forth such an idea. The ancient Muslim commentators, such as Ibn Mazar and Abu Hatim, quoted ibn Muniyah to affirm explicitly that the Torah and the Injeel are still in the same state of purity as when they were brought down from heaven, and that no modification has been made to them. The Jews just had the habit of deceiving the people by unfounded arguments and in twisting the meaning of Scripture.

Can a Corrupt Book Confirm a Revelation from God?

Surah 2:40,41 – *Al-Baqarah* says, “Children of Israel, remember my blessing wherewith I blessed you... And believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it.” (Translation of A. J. Arberry).

Surah 5:68,69 – *Al-Ma'idah* says:

“Say, ‘People of the Book, you have no ground to stand on until you observe the Torah and the Gospel and what is revealed to you from your Lord’... Believers, Jews, Sabaeans and Christians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right—shall have nothing to fear nor shall they grieve.”

The reader cannot help but draw the conclusion that, **according to the Qur’an, the revela-**

tions granted to the people of the Book were still available to them. There is no indication that these Scriptures had been taken away or annulled by God, or corrupted by men. To the contrary, the existence of the Scriptures is plainly confirmed.

The second of these two passages warns the people of the Book that if they do not observe the Torah and the Injeel, they are disbelievers (*kifirun*). If the authentic texts had not been available, why would the Qur'an tell the people of the Book to observe them and obey them?

We have already quoted Surah 4:136: "Believers, believe in God and His Messenger and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger, as well as what He sent down before. He who denies God, His angels, His Scriptures, His messengers and the Last Day has surely gone far astray." Given that the Qur'an commands the faithful to believe in all the books (that is, to learn, to understand and to follow what is in them), their contents must not have been corrupted or annulled.

Finally, even Muhammad, in case of doubt, was supposed to refer to the Scriptures entrusted to the Jews and the Christians. Allah said to him in Surah 10:94 – Yunus, "If you are in any doubt concerning what We have sent down to you, then question those who have read the Book before you: the Truth has come

to you from your Lord, so do not be one of the doubters.” Does it not seem strange to you that certain Muslims claim that the Bible was annulled, taken away to heaven, or corrupted so that it is no longer a trustworthy guide? Obviously, one could not use a corrupted book to evaluate or confirm the Qur’an.

How Did God Preserve the Bible?

The first Muslims believed that God had watched over the revelations that He had given prior to the time of Muhammad; God continues to protect and preserve His Word. But how does He do it, and what proofs can we furnish to show that the Bible has survived intact?

A Little History

To better understand the preservation of the Bible, and especially of the New Testament, it would be useful to remind ourselves of the history of the first centuries of Christianity.

The books which make up the New Testament were written by the apostles and other God-inspired men in the years following the death of Jesus. These men were either eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus, or men who had a lot of contact with the eyewitnesses. They finished writing these books before the end of the first century, during the

lifetime of those who had known Jesus personally, his enemies as well as his friends. This is important when we consider that these books were circulating just about everywhere in the world at the time when it would have been easy to point out errors, lies or exaggerations. The writers of the Bible could not have allowed themselves to invent miracles that Jesus did not do or teachings that he never gave. We should point out that typically a great deal of time passes between the lives of great men of history and the writing of the first biographies telling their stories. For example, the principle biographies describing for us the life of Alexander the Great, the Greek emperor who conquered the world from Greece all the way to India, were written around 400 years after his death. Ibn Ishaq, the author of *Sira Rasul*, the first biography of Muhammad, was born more than 70 years after the death of the prophet. He was not a witness of the events that he described and would barely have been able to speak with an eyewitness of even the latest events in Muhammad's career. Besides, we no longer even have his book, but only an abridged version produced by Ibn Hisham, who died 60 years after Ibn Ishaq. So the nearness of the Gospel writers to the events they describe gives us confidence that these are reliable accounts.

Let us consider then the matter of how these writings were preserved in such a way that they did not undergo changes.

Original Texts and First Copies

The books which make up the New Testament were written in the Greek language, which at that time was the *lingua franca*, the international language which was used every day by people in all the countries of the Roman Empire. The authors wrote on papyrus, a kind of paper made from a type of reed that grew in Egypt. These accounts of the life of Jesus and letters addressed to churches and individual disciples were sent to various cities of the world. Those to whom they were addressed carefully made copies of them in order to share them with others. These handwritten copies are called manuscripts. Each local congregation made sure to acquire them in order to teach its members. These manuscripts did not all come from a single place or from one central organization. Christians in every city, region and country applied themselves to the task of lovingly recopying these texts so that as many people as possible might have access to them. This is why they began very early on to translate the Gospel into different languages. Just as today there are people in English-speaking countries who do not speak English and people in French-speaking countries who

do not understand French, there were some people at that time who did not know Greek. Translations of the Bible were made for them in their own languages, just as translations of the Bible and the Qur'an exist in various languages today.

(It seems worthwhile to point out parenthetically that some people are confused by the word "version," which is often used in the place of "translation." These people think that the different "versions" of the Bible are different Bibles, books with very different contents and meanings. This is not at all the case. These are translations made from the same Greek text in order to make it understood by those who do not know the Greek language. We can have several translations in the same language because languages evolve over time and because not everyone has the same level of instruction or the same vocabulary. I personally own four different translations of the Qur'an in English and two in French. Even though they do not use exactly the same words, the ideas are the same. These translations are very useful, given the fact that it is estimated that 80% of Muslims around the world do not speak Arabic.)

Back to the subject of manuscripts. Copies were made not only because of the growing number of Christians and local churches, but also because papyrus, the paper of that day,

was not very durable. The manuscripts were used constantly, and with time they wore out. It was necessary to make new copies both for the new congregations and to replace those that were no longer in good condition.

As you can certainly see, we do not have the original manuscripts, written by the hands of the apostles; but that should not alarm you. You see, we don't have the original manuscript of the Qur'an either, the one produced by Zaid ibn Thabit on the orders of the Caliph Abu Bakr. Contrary to popular opinion, we no longer possess the copies made from this first manuscript, copies which were made later at the command of the Caliph Uthman. In this we are in much the same situation whether we speak of the Bible or of the Qur'an: the originals are not available today.

Thousands of Manuscripts

On the other hand, we possess thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Bible, and here is where we see the hand of God protecting His word. To be more specific, we have at least four kinds of manuscripts which allow us to confirm that the Bible we possess today is the same word of God that was given to begin with.

Archeologists have discovered thousands of partial manuscripts which date back to the time from 100 A.D. to 325 A.D. These are man-

uscripts containing parts of the New Testament. They are in complete agreement with the manuscripts of the entire New Testament produced later on in the form of books (codex) rather than scrolls. Furthermore, when we compare these partial or complete manuscripts to one another, we see that they are derived from the same original sources.

As for the complete manuscripts, there are several of them. One of the oldest is the Codex Sinaiticus. It dates from 325 A.D. and is kept in the British Library in London. Other complete manuscripts are the Codex Vaticanus, which dates from 350 A.D. and the Codex Alexandrinus, which dates back to 400 A.D. All modern translations of the Bible are made on the basis of these manuscripts. It is very, very significant that Muhammad was born in 570 A.D. ***The Injeel could not have been corrupted after the lifetime of Muhammad. The manuscripts of the Injeel which we possess today go back centuries before his ministry.*** In recommending that people read the Scriptures of the people of the Book, Muhammad explicitly gave his approval to the very texts that Christian and Jews read today.

There are people who do not understand the value of having so many thousands of manuscripts. Consider this: suppose that someone, a non-inspired man, had gathered together all the copies of the Injeel, that he

had made his own manuscript, and that he had burned all the other copies. From that point on, all future copies of the Injeel would have come from that single copy made by this person. There would no longer be any means of verification to prove that this man had not omitted certain parts or added things or changed the words that had been used originally. If, in looking at the copies that had been sent to him, he saw any variants, he could have chosen only the versions of the text that suited him and his supporters. After all, if the copies that had been sent to him had not differed here and there from the manuscript that he produced, there would have been no reason to burn them after finishing his work. Destroying all “unofficial” copies would only be useful if one wanted to hide something or silence all other points of view. The multitude of New Testament manuscripts that we have today gives us reason, not to doubt, but to have complete confidence that God has preserved His word.

Three Ways to Confirm the Manuscripts

In addition to the number of manuscripts of which we have been speaking, we have three other tools to confirm the authenticity of the Bible.

1) One source of confirmation that the current text of the Bible is identical to that of

the early centuries of Christianity is the body of writings produced by those who are sometimes called the Church Fathers. These were leaders and theologians among the Christians during the first two centuries after the death of the apostles. They wrote letters to churches and even to unbelievers they wanted to persuade concerning the truth of the Injeel. These writings, produced by over 200 authors, contain so many direct quotations from the copies of the New Testament that was available to them that we could use them to verify the totality of the text that we have today. These quotations agree perfectly with the manuscripts of which we have spoken.

2) A second kind of document which confirms the text of the New Testament is something we call a lectionary. These books contained the designated Bible readings for public gatherings of the church throughout the year. More than 3,000 ancient lectionaries have been discovered and are available for study.

3) Finally, we can speak of the different translations of the Gospel made by the early Christians in the various languages of the day, such as Latin, Syriac, Copt, Armenian, Ethiopian, Nubian Arabic, Slavic and Persian. More than 6,000 manuscripts of ancient translations in many languages have been found.

One can retranslate these texts into Greek and then compare them to the Greek manuscripts that we have. The result confirms once again that the Bible we have today is the same as that of the early Christians. It has not been changed.

Proof to the Contrary?

It is easy to gratuitously claim that the Bible has been corrupted; it is something else to actually provide details and proof. For example, how and when were these changes made? Since manuscripts were scattered throughout the world, there would have been no way to change them all, especially in light of the fact that for centuries no centralized power or worldwide hierarchy existed among Christians. If the changes had been made before the time of Muhammad, it must be explained why, instead of warning that the Torah and the Gospel had been corrupted and were no longer trustworthy, he instead strongly recommended listening to them, following them and using them to confirm the message that he was receiving. On the other hand, the Bible cannot have been changed since the time of Muhammad, because the texts from which our modern translations are made go back centuries before the time of Muhammad.

We do not have space to describe all the efforts that enemies of the Faith have made

over the centuries to destroy all Christian scriptures, to tear up or burn every copy of the Bible. As we have already demonstrated, these efforts were all in vain. No, it is very clear: “No change can there be in the Words of Allah, this is indeed the supreme success” (Qur’an 10:64).

Why Did God Send Several Revelations?

A Muslim friend asked me this question: “Why did God send many prophets and give them other books, such as the Zabur (Psalms), the Injeel (Gospel), and the Qur’an, when he had already given the Torah to Moses? Why would we need the rest of the Bible in addition to the Torah, not to mention the Qur’an?” Here is the answer my friend gave me to his own question: “When the Jewish rabbis deformed the book that God had given previously, God sent another messenger with another divine book to remind people of what had been beforehand.”

Not a Simple Repetition of What Was Already Revealed

As we have already seen, my friend’s answer is not valid for several reasons.

Since I do not accept the idea that the word of God could be changed by men, who would have thus prevented Him from accomplish-

ing what He wanted, what answer can I give to the question raised by my friend: Why did God send many prophets and give them other books, even though He had already given the Torah to Moses?

The first thing to understand is that the different books of the Bible do not claim, as the Qur'an does, to merely repeat what had been revealed before. In Surah 41:43 – *Fussilat*, Allah says to Muhammad, “Nothing is said to you (O Muhammad) except what was said to the Messengers before you.” Each book in the Bible, on the other hand, plays a role in making known God's work, His will and His unfolding plan.

The first book of the Torah is called Genesis, which means “beginning.” It tells of the beginning (or creation) of the universe and of human beings, of the entrance of sin into the world, of the origin of the people of Israel, and of other “beginnings.” The next four books in the Torah contain laws which God gave to His people, Israel, and tell the rest of the story of this people during the lifetime of Moses. The twelve books which come next in the Old Testament give us the story of God's relations with the people of Israel over the course of the thousand years between the death of Moses and the ministry of the prophet Malachi. During these ten centuries, God sent various prophets, not to change the laws given to

Moses, but to call the people to obey these laws with love and faithfulness and to return to God when they had strayed from the right way. The messages that these prophets gave from God are found in seventeen other books of the Old Testament, called the major prophets and the minor prophets (“major” for the longer books, and “minor” for the shorter ones). There are five other books, including the Psalms of David, the Zabur. They contain a lot of practical wisdom for everyday life and inspired words of praise and supplication addressed to God. The law given to Moses is at the heart of all the other books of the Old Testament; in fact, the whole thing is sometimes referred to as “the Law.” It is also called the old covenant.

A Change Is Announced

It is important to know that the Old Testament looked forward to something else. Moses had spoken to the people of a prophet like himself whom God would raise up and to whom everyone would need to listen. (I know that Muslims believe that he was talking about Muhammad and that Christians believe he was speaking of Jesus. We will deal with that question elsewhere.) What I want to emphasize is that already in the time of Moses, God was telling the people to expect someone great whom He would send in the

future. Later, God told David that he would raise up one of David's descendants to rule over a kingdom that would have no end. Other prophets provided additional details concerning this descendant, known as the anointed one, the Messiah. One of the prophets who preached to the people before the fall of the Kingdom of Judah, six hundred years before Christ, spoke a message in which the Lord said, “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke” (Jeremiah 31:31,32).

To Fulfill, Not to Abolish

When Jesus came and began to preach, he made a statement that many people, including Christians, have misunderstood even to our time. He said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17,18). Here is a passage which, according to some people, supports the idea that the Law is eternal. But what does Jesus mean when

He said that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them? Jesus promising, in a way, to allow the Law to play the role for which it had been given. He is not simply going to remove it.

Suppose that I sign an IOU (“I, John Smith, promise to pay James Green the amount of \$200 on March 31”) to attest to the fact that I owe my neighbor \$200. If, on the day when he presents the paper that I signed, I grab the paper away from him and throw it in the fire, without repaying the money that I borrowed, I have abolished the document, but I have not fulfilled what was written. It is true that my neighbor can no longer use this paper to demand that I pay his money back. It has been destroyed. But I did not respect it. If, on the other hand, I pay him the money I owed and he writes on the paper that I have paid the amount in full, my neighbor cannot use the paper again to demand more money. But in that case, I respected the IOU that I had signed. In neither case can the paper be used again to require anything of me, but in the first scenario the paper was simply “abolished”; in the second scenario what was written was actually fulfilled. The words of Jesus do not mean that the Law was supposed to remain in effect forever, but that Jesus was going to respect the purpose for which the Law had been given.

Jesus said that the smallest part of the Law would not disappear until everything had been accomplished. By saying that, Jesus actually affirmed that the Law would disappear. Indeed, throughout the Gospel it is said that this event or that took place “to fulfill what was written by the prophets.” In John 19:30 we see the last words of Jesus before dying on the cross: “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” When Jesus came back to life, he tried to make his disciples understand the necessity of his sufferings and death. “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (Luke 24:44). Nothing was to disappear from the Law until all had been fulfilled. With the death of Christ, everything was fulfilled.

The Gospel teaches us a deep respect for the Law and the Prophets that preceded it, for we find many spiritual lessons there. But it also teaches us that the Law of Moses is no longer in effect. It has served the purpose for which God gave it. This purpose, as a matter of fact, was to lead us faith in Christ: “But before faith [the Gospel] came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to

the faith [the Gospel] which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25). Second Corinthians 3:6-11 teaches that the Law, although it was glorious, was temporary; the Gospel, which is permanent, surpasses it in glory. And this Gospel, this faith, according to Jude 3, “was once for all handed down to the saints.” God preserved His word and does not need to deliver it to mankind again.

We see then that the various books of the Bible were not revealed to rectify that which had been changed in the preceding revelations, as if men constantly managed to frustrate the Almighty and force Him to redo what He had already done. No. All of these revelations were steps in the plan of the Omniscient One, He who sees the end from the beginning. Each of these revelations played its role in this plan and brought it closer to its final objective. They form a harmonious whole, but we can see that only when we recognize that they lead us to Jesus, the Savior.

Ibn DAOUDA

Table of Contents

Does the Muslim have the right to read the Bible?	3
Has the Bible Been Corrupted?	8
How Did God Preserve the Bible?	16
Why Did God Send Several Revelations?	25

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