

A Christian's Guide to the Koran, Lesson 12, **The Miraculous Transmission of the Biblical Text, 1**

There is one battle Christians need to fight regarding the Muslim faith. Only one. A battle of words. Words of God. Once that battle has been fought and won in the Christian heart, the reading of the Koran becomes simply a viewing of light vs. darkness. For that person, the Koran and all Islam with it, will crumble into the sands of the Arabian desert. Failing that victory can mean eternal death to a casual visitor to Islam's holy book.

Oh take this warning seriously. Coming against Islam is not for the unprepared. The refutations of all that Christians hold dear are not subtle in the Koran, but are brutal, and at times even convincing. There's a logic to some of it, which those who trust only logic will buy.

You see, Muslims accuse Christians and Jews of inventing their own Scriptures and mixing them with authentic prophecies to create a sort of hybrid text that we call the Bible. Some scholars go so far as to say that the Bible was totally destroyed on two separate occasions. But if the Bible was totally destroyed once, how was it reconstructed to be destroyed again? Was it from memory? If so, the Muslim must agree that we now have a perfect Bible, for memory is in large part what gave us the Koran. If not by memory, how?

Muslims say that they are not negating the original Judeo-Christian message found in supposed "originals", all of which are lost except the Koran, of course, but that they are only denying the perversions that non-Muslims created and call "the Bible".

Two questions immediately surface, questions of life and death significance if the Muslim cannot answer them: First, where are these "originals" of which you speak? And second, if there are perverted Judeo-Christian texts, what documentation is there for any of this activity? We need an evolutionary history of some sort that traces the progress of a text that has been tampered with. In the first document there will be just a few "changes," then in a later one, many, and so forth, until you have a very different document. Where is evidence of such tampering, such evolution?

For example, perhaps Muslims could produce the "Injil" (good news, gospel) purportedly spoken to Jesus by Allah, and thence recited to His apostles. But did He ever write it? Where is it now? Without a sufficient answer (and there is none), we are left only with a circular argument that goes something like this:

The Koran is the true revelation from God.

How so?

Well, all the other revelations were tampered with.

But how do I know this?

The Koran says so. Believe it or perish.

But what of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

Corrupted. Bits and pieces of the truth, mixed with pure fabrications.

Corrupted from what?

From the Injil. You know, the original.

But where is the Injil, so I can see the corruption for myself?

It's been lost.

How do I know about it?

The Koran says so. Believe it or perish.

Hmmm. How do I know *which parts* of the Injil have been faithfully transmitted to the Prophet in the Koran?

Easily. The Koran is the final message from the final prophet. Everything you need is faithfully transmitted to that one book.

How do I know that?

The Koran says so. Believe it...

OK, OK, obviously, I don't believe it.

Now just in case I have already said some disturbing things to you, let me follow with some wonderfully happy facts about the Holy Books of Christians and Jews.

First I must say, this study of "transmission" of the text, as it is called, is a fascinating and deeply involved one, and though it is not the reason for my writing, one should definitely be armed with a confidence that God has spoken, and spoken well, and spoken finally, in His Son, through all that He said, all that He did, and all that He caused to be written. And, especially, that what He caused to be written He caused also to be preserved and passed on.

The preservation of the biblical text truly is a miracle. For it was in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies that we have the true "Injil", the apostolic word of God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus clearly stated that He would bring all things to the remembrance of the disciples so that they could indeed live by, pass on, and record in writing forever His glorious deeds and sayings (John 14:26).

When those texts were recorded, they eventually had to be passed on. Today scholars are aware of 24,000 copies of ancient manuscripts of portions of New Testament writings. Over 5,000 of them are complete New Testaments! Some date as early as the second and third centuries. This record is greater than all other writings of antiquity. Nothing matches the veracity of the New Testament text. What we have is essentially what they wrote! You can disagree with it. You can interpret it many ways. But the words are intact!

Where is the corruption heralded by Islam? Show us the proof. We have not only that ancient-document evidence, but a record of the transmission of the text in its earliest years, just after the church had come above ground. The publishing of the New Testament actually came into the hands of commercial book manufacturers in the Empire, men who worked with Christians to ensure accuracy was a prime consideration.

As monasteries began to form, rules were made and enforced for the scribes of the New Testament that were as stringent as those for the Old, documented below. By the time Muhammad appeared on the scene, those original texts of which we have copies today were well on their way to being passed on in meticulous fashion to the next generations. Monks could be severely punished for becoming careless in their work. As the scribes of old, these men believed they were passing on the very words of the Holy Spirit. In this they were correct, and we are grateful for their diligence.

What about variant readings in manuscripts? What if one monastery did make a marginal error, or skip a word by accident? Scholars agree that taken as a whole they are of such minor significance that they affect no doctrine of the Christian church. No article of faith, not even any minor responsibility is in any way questioned by these variations. The "imperfection" of the text thus keeps His people from worshiping a book, while His hand of guidance on every major and minor teaching keeps us praising Him for His marvelous care for His Word.

Next time we will talk of the Old Testament text and how God so marvelously kept it in intact.