

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 Muhammad. 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 Fakhar 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 revelations 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.