

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 accomplishing 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.