

The Miraculous Quran (4 of 11): The Detailed Preservation of the Quran

I was painfully aware of much of the history of the Bible and it was one of the main problems that I had with Christianity. I had asked pastors and the like about this question and most of them at that time, this was before the fundamentalists became very mainstream, were very open about it and would admit that there were problems with the historical authenticity of the Bible. At the same time, though, most of them proclaimed that the “teachings” have been preserved although the details may not have been. In other words, the Bible was clearly not God’s word; they would claim that the Biblical writers were “inspired” by God. That is the most that they could claim, although even that they could not prove. This seemed to me to be blind faith because if you do not know if the details have been preserved, how can you be so certain that the main teachings have truly been preserved. In reality, we do not even know who Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were and why exactly their names were attached to those famous Gospels.

In the light of this, I found Jeffrey, while trying to prove that there are some minor difficulties with the Quran, demonstrating that the compilation of the Quran from its earliest years is known in great detail, as most of his work was concerning the time of the Companions of the Prophet. I was very impressed and this supposed attack on the Quran simply, again as I alluded to earlier, made me continue in my study of the Quran. (Of course, much later I would read responses to Jeffrey’s arguments, totally refuting his claims of the Quran not being preserved intact.)

The Quran’s Promise that it Shall be Preserved

In any case, it caught my eye that the Quran says about itself:

“We have revealed the reminder and We shall preserve it.” (Quran 15:9)

This was interesting to me because within the Quran there is a clear reference as to how the previous peoples fail to preserve completely the message that they received. Hence, in the light of what the Quran was saying about previous revelations, this was a very bold statement. And, incidentally, it can be considered one of the prophecies of the Quran- coming from a

Judeo-Christian perspective, prophecies were somewhat important to me. If they did not come to pass, they would be very damaging in my eyes while if they did come to pass, I would consider that a very good sign.

Once again, the history of Islam presents a different scenario than that of the earlier revelations. The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, lived just over 1400 years ago. He is definitely the most “historical” of the various prophets. Thus, the history of the Quran is known and documented.

The Quran was preserved with meticulous care. The Quran describes itself as both a “reading” (Quran) and a book (kitaab). In fact, it was via both of these means that the Quran was meticulously preserved.

During the life of the Prophet, the Prophet had specific scribes whose job was to record the revelation when he received it. The Quran was not revealed all at once. It was revealed and recorded over a period of twenty-three years. During that time, revelation could come to the Prophet at any time. When it did, it would be recognized by physical signs on the Prophet (a point that led some to claim that he was simply epileptic). He would then call for his scribes and tell them what had been revealed and exactly where the new passage fits vis-à-vis what had already been revealed by God.

The Quran, which is not a large book, was also preserved in memory as well as written form from the time of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Many of the Companions of the Prophet had memorized the entire Quran and, fearing what had happened to earlier religious communities, they took the necessary steps to protect it from any form of adulteration. The Quran continues to be memorized today—another amazing aspect of the Quran. In fact, God says about the Quran:

“And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember...” (Quran 54:17)

To this day, millions of Muslims have the Quran memorized. If Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* were to be a reality today and all the books were to be burned to ashes, the Quran would still survive. Muslims would be able to rewrite the entire Quran from memory.

Soon after the death of the Prophet, the Quran was all compiled together and shortly afterwards official copies were sent to the distant lands to ensure that the text was pure. To this day, one can travel to any part of the world and pick up a copy Quran and find that it is the same throughout the world. Even the language of the Quran, which is essential to keeping a true understanding of the text, has been preserved. Such cannot be said for earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus, whose Hebrew and Aramaic no longer exist.

As noted earlier, the greatest care was taken to make sure that anything that did not belong to the revelation directly from God—even the Prophet's own statements—were kept completely out of the Quran. The Quran was nothing but the words that the Prophet received as revelation and informed his followers that they formed part of the Quran.

Hence, the Quran is completely different from the Bible, which includes stories about the prophets, comments on their lives and teachings, letters and writings by non-prophets and so forth. No such human interpolations and additions can be found in the Quran whatsoever.

Thus, the Quran originally impressed me in two ways:

First, it clearly proclaimed itself to be the word of God and was not interlaced with words from humans.

Second, it was minutely preserved from the time of its revelation. These two points meant that the Quran met my logical parameters for religion and revelation. I was therefore ready to move on to further study and analyze its teachings.

By the way, someone may rightfully ask as to why it is that God allowed his earlier revelations to be distorted and not preserved. One can actually think of a lot of important reasons behind this.

First, as is clear in their own scriptures, the earlier prophets, such as Moses and Jesus, were not sent for all of mankind. Their messages were clearly for the Tribe of Israel and for their particular times.

Actually, God teaches us that all peoples had messengers who were sent to them and whose purposes were limited. The Prophet Muhammad, and therefore his revelation, is meant for all of humankind from his time until the Day of Judgment.

Secondly, if their revelations were preserved, their followers could use that as a reason for continuing to follow their prophets and refusing to follow the Prophet Muhammad. Since it is very clear via many means, such as historical evidence, contradictory statements within the text and so on, that their scriptures have not been preserved in detail and that they cannot claim to be following what is purely God's religion—not mixed with human interpolation—they have no valid excuse not to abandon their non-preserved revelation for the true, complete and exact revelation from God found in the Quran.

Unfortunately, space does not permit a detailed discussion of this topic although it was extremely important to my comparison between the Bible and the Quran. For the sake of brevity, the conclusions of one author concerning the Old Testament will be presented. After a lengthy discussion of the history of the Torah, Dirks concludes,

The received Torah is not a single, unitary document. It is a cut-and-paste compilation...with additional layering... While Moses, the person who received the original revelation, which the Torah is supposed to represent, lived no later than the 13th century BCE, and probably lived in the 15th century BCE, the received Torah dates to a much later epoch. The oldest identifiable substrata of the received Torah, i.e., J, can be dated no earlier than the 10th century BCE... Further, these different substrata were not combined into a received Torah until approximately 400 BCE, which would be approximately 1,000 years after the life of Moses. Still further, the received Torah was never totally standardized, with at least four different texts existing in the first century CE, which was approximately 1,500 years after the life of Moses.

Additionally, if one adopts the Masoretic text as the most "official" text of the received Torah, then the oldest existing manuscript dates to circa 895 CE, which is about 2,300 years after the life of Moses. In short, although the received Torah may well contain some portions of the original Torah, the provenance of the received Torah is broken, largely unknown, and can in no way be traced to Moses. [Jerald F. Dirks, *The Cross & the Crescent* (Beltsville, MD: Amana

Publications, 2001), p. 53. Other important discussions of the authenticity of the Old Testament may be found in Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Quran and Science* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1978), pp. 1-43; M. M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester, United Kingdom: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), pp. 211-263.]

Although Jesus came many centuries after Moses, the revelation that he received did not fare much better. A group of Christian scholars known as the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar tried to determine which of the sayings attributed to Jesus can actually be considered authentic. They stated, “Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him.” [Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What did Jesus Really Say?* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 5.] In describing the history of the gospels, they wrote, “The stark truth is that the history of the Greek gospels, from their creation in the first century until the discovery of the first copies of them at the beginning of the third, remains largely unknown and therefore unmapped territory.”

[Funk, et al., p. 9.] Bart Ehrman’s work *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* has identified how the scripture has been changed over time. He states his thesis, which he proves in detail, at the outset,

“My thesis can be stated simply: scribes occasionally altered the words of their sacred texts to make them more patently orthodox and to prevent their misuse by Christians who espoused aberrant views.”

[Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xi.] That is something like putting the cart before the horse: The beliefs should be based on the transmitted texts and the texts should not be altered to fit the beliefs.

Note that these first two premises concerning the sound religion are closely related to each other. It is a general recognition on the part of many Christians that their texts have not been exactly preserved. This implies human interpolation and distortion. Since the text has been distorted in some way, it leads them to believe that they must “correct” the text. Hence, they give themselves ultimate authority to decide what the religion should be.

Thus, in October 2005, the bishops of England could come up with a paper stating that there are many aspects of the Bible that one should not consider true. They go on to delineate what is true in the Bible and what is not true. If the original texts were minutely preserved, there would be no need for any correction or new authority to state what is acceptable and what is rejected.

The Quran itself refers to the distortion of the earlier books by the previous peoples as well as their attempts to conceal some of the revelation. See, for example, Quran 5:14-15 and 4:46.

A detailed history of the Quran and its preservation may be found in M. M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester, United Kingdom: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), pp. 1-208.

The differences between Classical Arabic (the language of the Quran) and Modern Standard Arabic are slight and inconsequential. One completely unfamiliar with Arabic can skim through the following book that points out when such differences occur: Elsaid Badawi, M. G. Carter and Adrian Gully, *Modern Written Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar* (London: Routledge, 2004).