

Revelation and the Qur'an: Has God Spoken Through Muhammad?

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The vivid images of looming, crescent-mooned spires, masked women, exotic Arabic calligraphy, and headlines of radical Islamist activity can cause interest or even fear in those that find themselves outside of the Muslim faith. In many ways, Christians and Muslims could not be more different. But Christians may be surprised to find familiar biblical stories and characters in Islam's holy book: the Qur'an. The Qur'an connects its authority in part to biblical prophets such as Abraham, Noah, Jonah, David, and even Jesus. In addition, both Christians and Muslims claim that God has spoken through the prophets in order to communicate his divine will to mankind. It is of crucial importance for both faiths to determine what the nature of revelation is and whether God has spoken through Muhammad in the Qur'an.

Inspiration

Many world religions claim to have an inspired word from God. What are the criteria by which someone can know that he has the true Word of God in his hands? Muslims appeal to arguments similar to those used by Christians. However, it is important to analyze the differences between the approaches to understand what is at the heart of Qur'anic claims to inspiration and inerrancy.

The Qur'an and Inspiration

The word *reveal(ed)* occurs 146 times² (see Table 1) and *revelation* occurs 215 times³ in the English translation of the Qur'an. In contrast, the word *recite* occurs forty-six times. Most of the occurrences of *reveal(ed)* speak of Muhammad as the recipient of the revelation, and Allah is the speaker. Interestingly, the next most frequent context for *reveal(ed)* is that Christians and Jews should believe in their own revelation and/or Qur'anic revelation.

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² All Qur'anic citations are from the Pickthal English translation, available at <https://www.quranexplorer.com>.

³ Muhammad Abu-Hamdiyyah provides a Muslim definition of revelation: "Revelation means a disclosure, an enlightening experience or divine or supernatural communication. Two main words are used in the Qur'an for revelation. The first is *wahy-un* (with *un* for pronunciation only, standing for the nunnation), the verbal noun of the verb *waha* (*wahaya*) meaning 'to reveal', 'inspire' or 'indicate', and some variations of this verb, namely *awha* (the causative form of *waha*) meaning 'to cause inspiration', 'give sign' or 'indicate'. The second usage is based on the verb *nazala*, meaning 'to descend', but mostly in the intensive form (*nazzala*) or the causative form (*anzala*), both with the meaning 'to cause to descend or send down'." *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 26.

Table 1. Occurrences of *Reveal(ed)* in the Qur'an

Topic	Passages
Revealed to Muhammad	2.23, 2.285, 2.4, 2.62, 3.29, 3.3, 3.44, 3.7, 4.105, 4.166, 4.61, 5.67, 5.81, 6.114, 7.2, 10.94, 11.12, 14.1, 15.6, 16.64, 16.89, 17.106, 18.1, 18.27, 20.13, 20.2, 20.38, 24.1, 25.1, 25.6, 39.2, 39.41, 47.2, 53.1, 64.8, 72.1, 76.23
Belief in Christian Scriptures	2.136, 2.213, 2.41, 3.199, 3.4, 3.65, 3.84, 3.93, 4.136, 4.162, 4.47, 5.44, 5.45, 5.46, 5.47, 5.48, 5.59, 5.66, 5.68, 5.83, 6.114, 6.91, 6.92, 13.36, 29.47, 35.31, 46.3, 61.6
People disbelieve the Prophet's message	2.176, 2.91, 4.6, 5.104, 5.64, 6.81, 9.127, 9.97, 13.1, 16.24, 21.5, 36.15, 43.31, 47.2, 47.26, 47.9, 67.9
People must believe or face judgment	2.176, 2.91, 4.6, 5.104, 5.64, 6.81, 9.127, 9.97, 13.1, 16.24, 21.5, 36.15, 43.31, 47.2, 47.26, 47.9, 67.9
The revelation in the Qur'an is clear	2.159, 2.99, 16.44, 22.16, 24.1, 38.7, 57.25
Denial that "association" was revealed	3.151, 7.33, 12.40, 30.35, 39.65, 53.23
Scripture wards off evil	6.155, 7.26, 16.30, 20.113
The Arabs were the only ones who would believe the Qur'an	26.198
Revealed on the blessed night	44.3, 97.1
Revealed in the month of Ramadan	2.185
Gabriel revealed	2.97
Holy spirit revealed	16.102
The Qur'an revealed in parts and order	17.106, 25.32
Response to Christians	29.46
Challenge verse	2.23
Response of a convert	5.83
Day of discrimination	8.41
Surahs reveal what is in the hypocrite's heart	9.64
Surah increases faith	9.134
Allah could withdraw his revelation	17.86, 39.23
God gives knowledge to see revelation/believe	34.6, 34.50
Miscellaneous	2.1-2, 2.231, 3.154, 5.101, 6.145, 7.143, 9.86, 11.14, 13.19, 15.9, 21.1, 38.29, 42.17, 42.51, 57.16

The Qur'an itself is not clear whether the Qur'an was revealed all in one night or in parts later. A synthesis of the data and the common explanation from Muslims is that the blessed night marks the first revelation of the Qur'an, and the surahs (i.e., verses) were taught to Muhammad over a period of about twenty-two years. However, there is some disagreement in Muslim scholarship on exactly what

this process and initial revelation entailed.⁴ Gabriel and the holy spirit⁵ are typically considered synonymous. Nöldeke explains that “Muhammad claimed to have received his revelations from the divine spirit, روح القدس, الروح (Hebr.) and considered it to be an angel who, in the Medinan sūras, is also called جبريل, Gabriel.”⁶ Scholars disagree about exactly what are the various types of revelations that Muhammad received, and not all of them refer to Qur’anic revelations.⁷ The basic consensus is that the surahs can be divided within the twenty-plus-year period into two general timeframes: those received during the Meccan period and those received during the Medinan period. The Qur’an warns that those who do not believe the message of Muhammad will suffer eternal punishment. If these claims were universally true, it would, of course, be of crucial importance for everyone to pay attention to the claims of the Qur’an to determine whether the Qur’an indeed contains revelation from God.

Inimitability

One of the proofs for inspiration given in the Qur’an and by Muslim scholars is the doctrine of inimitability. This doctrine teaches that the Qur’an is so unique in style and content that no one can produce a writing like it. This doctrine is rooted in Qur’anic teaching in the various “challenge” verses, as they have come to be called.

Table 2. Challenge Verses in the Qur’an

Reference	Verse
2.23	And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a surah of the like thereof, and call your witness beside Allah if ye are truthful.

⁴ Muslim scholar Mansour Leghaei describes the various views: “In spite of the above evidences, some of the scholars—both from the Shi’a and the Sunni schools—claimed that the Qur’an addition to its gradual revelation has also come down all at once in the Night of Qadr (Decree) in the month of Ramadan. As for the recipient of this type of revelation they are of three different opinions: 1) Those of Sunni school claimed that the entire Qur’an has come down in the Night of Qadr from God to the heaven of this world and from there it has come down to the Prophet (S) gradually over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is a Hadith narrated from Ibn Abbas. 2) Of the Shi’a scholars who merely rely on the Narrations and are known as (al-akhbaryoun: Traditionalists) they claim that the entire Qur’an has come down to al-Baytul-Ma’mour (in the fourth heaven) and from there has come down gradually to the Prophet of Islam (S) over 20 years. The basis of this opinion is also some Narrations. 3) The late Allama Tabatabai while believing in gradual as well as the revelation of the Qur’an all at once asserts that the recipient of the Qur’an in its entire revelation similar to its gradual revelation was the Prophet (S) himself. However, he claims that there is a different reality for the noble Qur’an beyond its present format. The Almighty Allah sent down that ‘reality’ to the Prophet (S) in the night of Qadr and then throughout twenty three years or so, the detailed Qur’an was gradually revealed to him. The main proof of his eminence is the claim that the Arabic term ‘NAZAL’ (sent down) if used in the category of ‘Efal’ such as ‘Enzal’ it means ‘sending down all at once’ whereas if it is used in the category of ‘Tafeel’ it means ‘sending down gradually.’” *Sciences of the Qur’an (“Uloom al-Qur’an”)*, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://al-islam.org/sciences-quran-uloom-al-quran-mansour-leghaei/lesson-2-was-holy-quran-sent-down-gradually-and-all#was-quran-revealed-gradually-and-all-once>.

⁵ The phrase *holy spirit* is in lower case here because the figure spoken of in the Qur’an is significantly different from the third person of the Trinity in Christian theology.

⁶ Theodor Nöldeke, et al., *The History of the Qur’ān*, Texts and Studies on the Qur’ān 8, ed. and trans. Wolfganh H. Behn (Boston: Brill, 2013), 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

Reference	Verse
10.38	Or say they: He hath invented it? Say: Then bring a surah like unto it, and call (for help) on all ye can besides Allah, if ye are truthful.
11.13	Or they say: He hath invented it. Say: Then bring ten surahs, the like thereof, invented, and call on everyone ye can beside Allah, if ye are truthful!
17.88	Say: Verily, though mankind and the jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another.
28.49	Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Then bring a scripture from the presence of Allah that giveth clearer guidance than these two (that) I may follow it, if ye are truthful.
52.33–34	Or say they: He hath invented it? Nay, but they will not believe! Then let them produce speech the like thereof, if they are truthful.

The word *surah* used refers to something like a chapter division. However, the surah divisions are, according to the Qur'an, part of the divine revelation. The context of the challenge verses is that the hearers of the Prophet Muhammad questioned whether he had indeed received revelation from God. Islamic scholar Mohammad Elshinawy argues that “the inimitable nature of the Qur'an continues to be the most compelling proof that Muhammad ﷺ was, in fact, the final prophet of God.”⁸ Elshinawy organizes the nature of inimitability into four aspects: literary features, historical information, preservation, and spiritual power.⁹ Other scholars of the Qur'an identify three aspects of inimitability: “the literary, the scientific, and the moral and social.”¹⁰ However, the Qur'an itself in these verses is not clear on the exact nature of inimitability. The most natural inference from textual evidence is that inimitability has to do primarily with the actual speech or style of the writing, and indeed most scholars list the literary aspect first, as seen above.

Elshinawy asserts that “whether we consult the highest authorities of the Arabic language in early Arabia or its foremost experts among academics today, there is consensus on the literary uniqueness of the Qur'an.”¹¹ Modern readers of the Qur'an in English or Arabic note the unique and abrupt shifts in topics and the poetic rhyme and meter in the original Arabic. The poetic nature of the Arabic text is incredible considering the fact that Muhammad was illiterate and memorized and recited the text without ever penning any of the text himself or having formal education.¹² Muslims point to this fact as proof of the miracle of inimitability.

Other scholars dispute that uniqueness means a *positive* extraordinary aspect of the text. Nöldeke points out that “the sacred book has not even the artistic form of poetry; which among the Arabs, includes a stringent meter, as well as rhyme. . . . The Muslims themselves have observed that the tyranny of the rhyme often makes itself apparent in derangement of the order of words and in the

⁸ Mohammad Elshinawy, *The Inimitable Qur'an: The Revelation to the Prophet Muhammad* (n.p.: Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, n.d.), 2.

⁹ Ibid.; Elshinawy provides 15.9 as proof for preservation.

¹⁰ Muhammad Abdullah Draz and Adil Salahi, *The Qur'an: An Eternal Challenge* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2017), 43.

¹¹ *The Inimitable Qur'an*, 4.

¹² Ibid., 4.

choice of verbal forms which would not otherwise have been employed.”¹³ These changes include changes in place and people's names to conveniently match rhyme scheme and also insertions of content that are out of context in order to make the rhyme scheme and/or meter flow. These unique literary aspects could point either to divine inspiration or to a recension that forced certain characteristics on the text.

The Arabic Qur'an and Translation

The Qur'an teaches that the nature of the Qur'an is unique also in that its true form is in the Arabic language.¹⁴ One interesting teaching is that the Arabs were the only ones who would believe in Muhammad's message, so Allah sent the Qur'an in Arabic (26.198).

Because the Qur'an is the Word of Allah only in Arabic, any alteration, even translation of the text into another language, corrupts the original words of Allah.¹⁵ The translation may communicate similar meaning but does not constitute the accurate, preserved words of Allah. While some traditions would differ from the strict definition of the spoken Arabic as the actual Qur'an, one common position is that “God's Speech is identical to the Arabic Qur'ān in its sounds, letters, verses, and chapters (as well as other speech God has produced similar to the Qur'ān like the Torah and Gospel). The Qur'ān as speech is a created accident (‘arad) and does not endure by itself but must inhere in a substrate. This means that the Qur'ān is oral speech essentially and not a physical book or scripture, as conceived in the Sunni tafsīr tradition.”¹⁶ In fact, the word *Qur'an* means “recitation.” Therefore, the true Qur'an is the one memorized and recited by Muslims so that the recitation accurately preserves the exact “Lecture in Arabic” that Muhammad received from the angel.

Coeternal with Allah or Created?

Another aspect of inspiration is the Qur'anic teaching about the coeternality of the Qur'an with Allah. The Hadith (Muslim history and the sayings of Muhammad) and the Qur'an teach that Muhammad received the Qur'an from the angel Gabriel at a historical moment in time. However, the Qur'an has been understood to teach that the Qur'an is also coeternal with Allah. The Qur'an teaches that Allah possesses the “Source of Decrees,” “the mother of the Book,” and “a guarded Tablet [of the glorious Qur'an]” (43.4, 85.21, 13.39).

¹³ Theodor Nöldeke, “The Koran,” in *The Origins of the Koran: Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998), 45.

¹⁴ The Qur'an passages that state this doctrine are as follows: 12.2, 13.37, 16.103, 20.113, 26.195, 39.28, 41.3, 42.7, 43.3, 46.12.

¹⁵ Due to space limitations, treatment of the seven *ahruf* or *harfs* (dialects) of the Arabic Qur'an is not possible. See chapter 6 of Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, *Al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, The Prolegomena to the Qur'an*, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://al-islam.org/al-bayan-fi-tafsir-al-quran-prolegomena-quran-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/13-quran-created-or>.

¹⁶ Khalil Andani, “Revelation in Islam: Qur'anic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2019), 298.

Theologians from the Ash'arite tradition argue that the Qur'an is uncreated or eternal. For anything to share eternity with Allah would seem to rival his position as the ultimate, one God. Thus, this doctrinal tension has been the source of much debate for Muslim theologians.

Because of this seeming violation of the unity of God, theologians in the Mu'tazilite tradition argue for the created Qur'an.¹⁷ One line of reasoning to explain the doctrinal tension is that the above surahs are referring to the origin of the Qur'an in Allah himself, namely in the characteristic of Allah's justice. In 'Abd al-Jabbar's model, this doctrine is called the "revelatory principle."¹⁸ Scholar Khalil Andani summarizes the major points of the debate and the various theories that have been offered to explain this doctrinal tension:

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Mu'tazilī theologians Ja'far b. Harb and Ja'far b. Mubashshir held that the original Qur'ān was created in the Guarded Tablet and what humans recite as Qur'ān is a reproduction (*hikāya*) and likeness (*mithl*) of the original Speech of God. The Kullābī and Ash'arī positions on this issue evolved over time: Ibn Kullāb saw the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, heard, written, and memorized as the impression (*rasm*), expression (*'ibāra*) and recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's non-verbal eternal Speech; al-Ash'arī followed him in maintaining that the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, written, and memorized was an expression (*'ibāra*) and recitation (*qirā'a*) of the uncreated Speech of God. . . . al-Bāqillāni and his Ash'arī successors rejected the concept of *'ibāra* as inappropriate but retained the idea of the Arabic Qur'ān as the recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech.¹⁹

In all of the views there is some aspect that the Qur'an is possessed by Allah and some aspect that the Qur'an was transmitted from Gabriel to the Prophet. Theologian and scholar Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, who was a spiritual leader of the Shia Muslims, explains that "at any rate, what is well established among them is that they regard the speech [*al-kalam* = the Word = the Qur'an] as eternal [even though] . . . as stated earlier, those other than the Ash'arites scholars are in agreement that the Qur'an was created, and that the uttered speech of God is like His primordial commands: They were created by Him and a sign among His signs. No useful purpose is attained from the theological debate on this question."²⁰ Abu al-Qasim represents a third view in the scholarship that discussion and analysis of this theological question is of no profit. However, that Muslims hold the Qur'an in this high of a regard as far as its connection with the very being of Allah is an important cultural note to keep in mind when discussing the Qur'an with Muslims.

¹⁷ For an excellent and simple summary of the history and points of debate about this issue, see Brother Daniel, "Is Divine Unity Compromised by the Eternality of the Qur'an?" accessed March 17, 2025, <https://ewntlehulu.net/en/eternity-of-the-quran/>.

¹⁸ Andani, 303.

¹⁹ Ibid., 303–304.

²⁰ *Al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, chapter 6.

The Bible as an Inspired Word from God

One common misconception about Muslims is that they reject the Bible as an authoritative spiritual text. While the Qur'an takes priority as God's Word, the Qur'an teaches that the Bible is supposed to be read by Muslims.²¹ Because the people who doubt are told to consult the Jews and Christians who "had been reciting the Book before" (10.94–100), it appears that the Bible should confirm everything that the Qur'an asserts. The Qur'an also utilizes a significant amount of material apparently from the Bible. Allah says that he sent the Torah to Moses, the Injil (Gospel) to Jesus, and the Zabur (Psalms) to David. The Torah and Injil are both called "guidance and light" (5.41–53). The word *imam* "guidance" even means a criterion or standard. Jews and Christians are called "People of the Book" (e.g. 3.71) and are expected to believe the message of the Qur'an because of previous revelation that they had received.²²

Overall, the Qur'anic testimony is very positive about the Torah and Injil and views Muhammad as the final prophet in the long line of prophets accepted by Christians (4.163–165). This fact can be confusing to those from a Christian or Jewish background because it would seem that reading the Gospels especially would contradict the doctrines of Islam and would not be encouraged.

Muslims believe that the manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments were corrupted through copying. Nickel's comprehensive work on this issue reveals that "Muslims believe that somehow, at some time in the past, Jews and Christians 'altered' or 'falsified' the revelations which God gave them, so that their scriptures are now 'corrupted.' The doctrine of scriptural corruption, known in Arabic by

²¹ See the verses that address the pre-Islamic Scriptures: 2.75–82, 2.104–110, 3.2–4, 4.163–165, 5.41–53, 5.111–115, 6.154, 10.94–100, 11.17, 28.43–51. Gordon Nickel details the data further (*Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'an*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 13 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 39–40):

"Three particular earlier scriptures are mentioned by name in the Qur'an: the Tawrāt, the Injil, and the Zabūr. The names Tawrāt and Injil first appear at the beginning of the third Sūra, together at Q 3:3. The name Zabūr first appears at Q 4:163.

"The term Tawrāt appears some 18 times in the Qur'an. It appears six times in the third Sūra and seven times in the fifth Sūra, but not at all in Sūras one, two, four and six. Beyond the fifth Sūra, the word Tawrāt occurs only five times.

"The term Injil occurs some 12 times in the Qur'an. The pattern of its occurrence is similar to that of the term Tawrāt: three times in the third Sūra, five times in the fifth Sūra, and beyond the fifth Sūra only four other times. Indeed, in all but two of its occurrences, the term Injil appears in tandem with Tawrāt.

"The singular noun Zabūr occurs some three times in the Qur'an. The root *z-b-r*, however, appears a total of 13 times. Its pattern of occurrence is quite different from the other two names of scriptures: in the first five *sūras*, Zabūr appears only once and its plural form only once. The singular Zabūr never appears together with the other two names of scriptures. If [*sic*] fact, it does not even appear in the near contexts of the other names."

²² "In a series of farmans made to Ismailis living in North America and Europe in 1983, the present Ismaili Imam reminded his community that Christians are the 'People of the Book' (ahl al-kitāb) and that this warrants warm relations between Ismailis and their Christian neighbors. Throughout these farmans, the Aga Khan shared his interpretation of 'the Book' (al-kitāb) as follows: 'The Book is the revelation which Allah has given to man through His Prophets and through the last and final prophet, Prophet Muhammad. That Book is the totality of Allah's revelation to mankind.' It is highly significant that the present Imam of the Nizārī Ismailis understands 'the Book' or al-kitāb as 'the totality of Allah's revelation' or 'the revelation which Allah has given to man' through all of the Prophets, as opposed to discrete physical scriptures like the Bible or Qur'an. . . . The Aga Khan repeated this idea when asked about the relationship between Islam and other religions in an interview in Syria shortly after the events of September 11: 'Islam is a faith that recognises the preceding monotheistic interpretations, Judaism and Christianity, called the "People of the Book." It is one Book. So for me there is no doubt whatsoever.'" Andani, 739–40.

the term *tahrīf*, is all but ubiquitous in the Muslim world.”²³ One would think that since this belief is held so widely by Muslims, the Qur'an would clearly teach this kind of corruption of the pre-Islamic Scriptures. However, the Qur'anic verses on the topic do not clearly say exactly what Scriptures were “corrupted” or what the nature of the change, tampering, or corruption was. This is partially due to the Arabic verb that is used for this idea.

Table 3. Qur'anic Verses on Tampering with the Pre-Islamic Scriptures

References	Topic
2.42, 2.146, 3.71, 21.110, 28.69, 36.76, 64.4	They conceal the truth.
2.79	They write and lie that it is Scripture.
3.78	They “distort the Scripture” and “speak a lie” about God.

As seen in the data here, Nickel explains that “the most frequent action of tampering in the Qur'an is concealing, indicated by the three Arabic verbs *katama*, *akhfā* and *asarra*.”²⁴ However, in these passages it is unclear who exactly the actors are and what they are doing. Concealing is certainly not the same thing as corrupting. However, the last two passages above are more convincing. But even some Muslim scholars admit this ambiguity in the text. Mahmoud Ayoub writes,

Contrary to the general Islamic view, the Qur'an does not accuse Jews and Christians of altering the text of their scriptures, but rather of altering the truth which those scriptures contain. The people do this by concealing some of the sacred texts, by misapplying their precepts, or by “altering words from their right position.” However, this refers more to interpretation than to actual addition or deletion of words from the sacred books.²⁵

One issue with this accusation is that there is no manuscript evidence that the Bible was corrupted in the ways that the Muslims claim. In historical research, primary, eyewitness sources are to be preferred. The Qur'an came hundreds of years after the Torah and the Gospel accounts. And the Qur'an contradicts the Bible on multiple historical points.²⁶ Unless Muslim scholars can prove with manuscript evidence some sort of systematic corruption of the Old and/or New Testament texts, there seems to be no reason to believe that the Qur'an as a later writing should replace the earlier eyewitness testimony of the Old and New Testaments. The Qur'an's claims about Jesus' death, for example, call

²³ Nickel, 1.

²⁴ Gordon Nickel, “Interpreting Qur'an Verses on Tampering,” accessed March 17, 2025, <https://adlucem.co/quran/interpreting-quran-verses-on-tampering-by-dr-gordon-nickel/>.

²⁵ Cited in idem, *Narratives*, 7.

²⁶ As Nöldeke points out, the reason may be that “there can thus be no doubt that Muḥammad's prime source of information was not the Bible but uncanonical liturgical and dogmatic literature. For this reason the Old Testament stories in the Koran are much closer to Haggadic embellishments than their originals; the New Testament stories are totally legendary and display some common features with the reports of the apocryphal Gospels, e.g., sūras 3:41 and 43 as well as 19:17 with *Evangelium Infantiae*, cap. 1, *Evangelium Thomasi*, cap. 2, and *Nativity of the Virgin*, chapter 9.” *History of the Qur'an*, 6.

into question the validity of any of the historical claims about Jesus. The Gospels' testimony provides eyewitness testimony, while the testimony of Muhammad clearly does not.²⁷

In summary, the Muslim view of the inspiration of the Qur'an is that the true, inimitable, and final revelation from God is the Qur'an as recited by the Prophet Muhammad and transmitted to his Companions. This revelation was either created by Allah or coeternal with him in the Arabic tongue. God also revealed truth through the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in the Bible, but these religious groups have distorted understanding of these Scriptures. Upon studying the Muslim doctrines of revelation, several contrasts with the biblical view of revelation and inspiration surface.

First, in contrast to the oral transmission of the Qur'an and contrary to views of some liberal biblical scholars, the revelation of the Bible was not dependent on oral transmission and the memory of man but rather on written records. The human writers of the Old and New Testaments wrote God's words in common human languages as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:20–21). Thus, inspiration applies solely to the autographs of the Scriptures, not to the human writers themselves. In addition, scriptural authority is not limited to one language such as the Qur'an's Arabic. Erickson explains that "here Peter is affirming that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. Rather the writers were moved or borne along (φερόμενοι—*pheromenoi*) by the Spirit of God. The impetus that led to the writing was from the Holy Spirit."²⁸ The Jews at this time considered "the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" as the Scriptures under the Mosaic Covenant (Luke 24:44–45). God breathed out the OT Scriptures, and the Scripture writers were aware of this work of God as they were writing (Mic 4:4; Amos 3:1; Acts 3:18–21; 2 Sam 23:2). Peter refers to the writings of Paul as Scripture, and John and Paul are conscious of divine authority in their writings (1 John 4:6; Rev 22:18–19; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13). The Old and New Testaments teach that the written component of the Scriptures of both Testaments is of the utmost importance as adding or taking away from the words of Scripture comes with a great warning (Rev 22:18–19; cf. Matt 5:18).

Second, in contrast to the Qur'anic doctrine of inimitability, the Christian Scriptures often appeal to the fulfillment of prophecy and the performing of miracles, rather than the irreproducibility of the exact style of the literature, as proof of God's revelation. God warns his people of false prophets that "prophecy for personal gain (Mic. 3:5, 11) and tell the people only what they want to hear (1 Kgs. 22:5–13; Jer. 5:31). Their predictions do not come true (1 Kgs. 22:12, 28, 34–35; cf. Deut. 18:22); their 'miraculous signs' are inferior or nonexistent (1 Kgs. 18:25–29; but see also Deut. 13:1–2)."²⁹ In contrast, the predictions of the OT consistently come to pass. For example, Joseph predicted that his bones would be carried out of Egypt (Gen 50:25; cf. Exod 13:19), the prophets predicted that Babylon

²⁷ It is hard to reconcile that the Qur'an appeals to the Torah and Injil as confirmation of the message of the Qur'an and yet denies the central biblical teachings on Jesus. I would argue for historical problems in the Qur'an's claims about Jesus because of this issue, especially considering the historical impossibilities of the swoon and replacement theories. If one accepts the miracle possibility that Allah could have made it only appear that Jesus was crucified, then the Qur'an's claims on that point could be valid. While I agree that God does have the power to do such a miracle, the implications concerning his character as a deceiver are very troubling.

²⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 204.

²⁹ W. A. Grudem, "Prophecy, Prophets," in *NDBT*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 706.

would take Israel into exile,³⁰ and, most notably, many passages anticipated the coming of the Messiah and were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.³¹

Muslims take the prophecy of Moses that a final prophet would come and see its fulfillment in the Prophet Muhammad. Taking the storyline and teaching of the OT in context (Deut. 18:15, 18; cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37), Jesus more clearly fulfills this prophecy as he is from the line of Israel (not of Ishmael like Muhammad) and has also fulfilled the law of Moses (cf. Matt 5:17). Muhammad can make no such claim to fulfillment concerning the law nor the additional claim of Jesus Christ to the Davidic throne (Matt 1:1–17; Acts 2:30). In addition, the miracles of the Old and New Testament prophets and Jesus Christ himself serve as further proof of the revelation they received from God. Moses' signs during the time of the exodus and wilderness wanderings served to validate God's authority and words given through Moses (Deut 4:34–35). The power and authority of Jesus were recognized by the Jews as so powerful that two of the Gospels give testimony that he was confused with the OT prophet Elijah, known for some of the greatest "signs and wonders" of the OT outside of Moses (Matt 16:14; Mark 8:28). Grudem makes the point that the "stories [of Elijah and Elisha's miracles] are echoed in the stories of [Jesus] (e.g. Luke 7:15/1 Kgs. 17:23). . . . The miracle stories reveal Jesus as the Son of David, the Son of God, the new Moses who not only teaches but fulfills the hopes of Isaiah 53 and is thus the Messiah in word and deed."³² The miracles as tangible proofs of the message of prophecy stand in great contrast with the only claim the Qur'an makes concerning its message, that the writing is just "inimitable." Not being able to be imitated pales in comparison with the proofs put forward in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures of the historical predictions that are verifiable in history and the revelation followed by signs and wonders. Though God provides such proofs, Jesus warns that demanding a sign can be wicked and explains that those who believe without seeing (the risen Christ—the greatest miracle of all) are actually more blessed (Mark 8:12; John 20:29).

Finally, in contrast with the doctrine of coeternality of the Qur'an, in biblical teaching the written Word of God is not coeternal with him. However, Christians believe that the entirety of the Scriptures serves to reveal the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus explained as much in a resurrection appearance to the two disciples who were disheartened after his death (Luke 24:27; cf. John 5:39–40, 46). Christ is said to be the Word of God himself (John 1:1–8) indicating further that the purpose of the Scriptures is to speak of him and his salvation to the world. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God the Father and the Word of God, himself coeternal with the Father (Col 1:13–17, 19), but the written word about him, the Scriptures, are not coeternal with the Godhead. At the same time, the plan of salvation as a plan in God's mind was "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews sums up the OT law and prophets and explains that though "God . . . at

³⁰ See 1 Kgs 14:15; 2 Kgs 20:17–18; Isa 39:7; cf. 2 Kgs 24:15–17; Ezra 5:12.

³¹ See Luke 24:27–49. Across all four Gospels, the writers reference OT prophecy to explain the events of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. The connections to the Psalms and the Book of Isaiah are especially notable. See for example, Matt 8:17 and Isa 58:4; Matt 27:35 and Ps 22:18; John 12:38 and Isa 53:1. Helpful studies of this topic include Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 2019); Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus Divine Messiah: The New and Old Testament Witness* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2001).

³² "Prophecy, Prophets," 776.

sundry times and in divers manners [spoke] in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,” he has “in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he [has] appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:1–2). Jesus is the final revelation of God to mankind. The OT prophesies of him and explains the history of his people up until his coming. The NT Gospels *manifest* him, Acts *proclaims* him, the epistles *explain* him, and John’s Revelation *reveals the consummation* of his plan and person.³³ As shown previously, the Qur’an systematically accuses the Christians of distorting the meaning of the Old and New Testament Scriptures to “associate” Jesus Christ with God. If, however, the Scriptures do not point to Jesus’ identity as God and the Messiah he has sent, then the Bible is not about much at all since this theme appears to be the main point. The Bible cannot be considered a conspiracy either for Jesus-worship as the Old and New Testament Scriptures were written by up to forty different authors over some 1,500 years. These aspects considered, the claims of the Qur’an about the Christian Scriptures appear to be a systematic effort to deny the truth about God, Christ, and divine revelation.

Inerrancy

The Qur’an and Inerrancy

Muslims claim that the Qur’an is inerrant because it is Allah’s inspired message to mankind, and the Prophet perfectly memorized it for it to be perfectly recorded. It is important to note that Muslims typically speak of the infallibility rather than the inerrancy of the Qur’an. According to Muslim scholar ‘Allamah Tabataba’i, infallibility is “the presence of a quality in a person that prevents him from committing any impermissible act such as a sin.”³⁴ Therefore, infallibility refers most clearly to Muhammad as the infallible prophet and the text as an accurate record of his recitation from Allah. The Qur’an refers to itself as the truth from Allah multiple times.³⁵ Joseph Islam names seven descriptions of the Qur’an from the Qur’anic text: “a clear guidance (huda),” “clear proof (burhan),” “explained in detail (fussilat),” “clear explanation of all things (tiabiana lekulli shayin),” “the ultimate scale—balance (mizaaan),” “discernment between truth and falsehood (furqan),” and “evidence absolutely clear (bayyina).”³⁶ These titles of the Qur’an speak to its claims of ultimate authority and its perfectly truthful nature. However, another scholar explains that

this theological principle [of infallibility] is firmly based on the attributes of Allah (awj) himself. In particular it is based on His omniscience (*ilm*), omnipotence (*qudrah*), the purposefulness of

³³ Adapted from Tommy Nelson, cited in Matt Smethurst, “Your Whole Bible Is About Jesus,” The Gospel Coalition, April 22, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-about-jesus/>.

³⁴ Cited in Ayatullah Mahdi Hadavi Tehrani, *Faith and Reason: A Compendium of Fifty Questions and Answers Related to Islamic Theology, Jurisprudence and Other Themes* (n.p.: The World Federation of KSIMC—Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities, 2006), n.p.; available at <https://al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/9466>.

³⁵ See the following passages: 38.84, 15.64, 43.78, 81.19, 2.147, 3.60, 23.90.

³⁶ Joseph A. Islam, “How the Quran Describes Itself,” accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.quransmessage.com/articles/how%20the%20quran%20describes%20itself%20FM3.htm>.

His actions (*hikmah*)—both in creation and legislation—and in essence, on the fact that He is free from impropriety, injustice, and purposelessness. If a prophet were to make a mistake in receiving or conveying revelation, this mistake would demonstrate either ignorance, weakness, or incompetence in Allah's (awj) actions.³⁷

The belief in the infallibility of the Qur'an is rooted most deeply in the character of Allah himself because the Qur'an is his revelation. Therefore, the Qur'an should be completely accurate in matters of science and history and be without contradiction.

A Sampling of Scientific and Historical Errors

Many Muslims find evidence of the inimitability and inerrancy of the Qur'an in what they consider to be amazing scientific accuracy for the limited knowledge at the time of its production. Stefano Bigliardi explains that Dr. Maurice Bucaille popularized this idea, and “the line of interpretation it follows reformulates the traditional doctrine of the formal inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jāz*) in terms of ‘scientific inimitability’ or ‘scientific miraculousness’ (*i'jāz 'ilmī*).”³⁸ Objections to the inerrancy of the Qur'an include its claims that babies are a clot of blood forming in the mother (Surah 23.14) and that the sun goes down into a hot, muddy spring of water (Surah 18.83–91). Scholars point out that these claims are problematic considering scientific knowledge today. In the case of the bloodclot passage, former Muslim Michael Germi observes that blood does not have generative properties (i.e., it is dead). Thus, whether it is imagery or a literal explanation, babies forming from blood clots does not make sense since blood cannot come to life.³⁹

Some Muslim commentators argue that the passage concerning the sun is metaphorical from the point of view of the speaker in that “when Dhu'l Qarnayn reached the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, he saw the sun in that manner, since his vision would not see anything beyond the water. And this is alluded to in His words (Exalted is He), *‘He found it setting.’* Allah didn't say, ‘It was setting.’ Indeed, the sun is in the sky and does not set in the earth.”⁴⁰ However, the fact that a *sahih* (considered the most authentic *ahadith*), pictures the situation as Muhammad's literal answer to a literal question about where the sun goes seems to refute the suggestion of a metaphorical interpretation of the passage.⁴¹ Therefore, this and other scientific errors in the Qur'an raise troubling questions about the claim that this book is revelation from God.

³⁷ Tehrani, n.p.

³⁸ Stefano Bigliardi, “The ‘Scientific Miracle of the Qur'an,’ Pseudoscience, and Conspiracism,” *Zygon* 52, no. 1 (2017): 146.

³⁹ Michael Germi, “Major Errors in the Quran!,” accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Luxy1zyGMQ>.

⁴⁰ “Tafsir of Surah Al-Kahf, Verses 83–101: The Story of Dhu'l Qarnayn,” Imam Ghazali Institute, accessed August 24, 2025, <https://www.imamghazali.org/blog/tafsir-surah-al-kahf-verses-83-101-dhul-qarnayn>.

⁴¹ See the hadith in question: “Narrated Abu Dharr: I was sitting behind the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) who was riding a donkey while the sun was setting. He asked: Do you know where this sets? I replied: Allah and his Apostle know best. He said: It sets in a spring of warm water (Hamiyah).” “Dialects and Readings of the Qur'an (Kitab Al-Huruf Wa Al-Qira'at),” accessed August 24, 2025, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/32>.

The Qur'an also contains historical mistakes. For example, it places Moses with Pharaoh and Haman (Surah 28.38). Haman could not have possibly known Moses and Pharaoh as they lived a thousand years apart: Haman in Persia and Moses in Egypt. Another mistake occurs in Surah 20.95. Moses is said to speak to a Samaritan, yet the Samaritans were not a people group until some 800 years later. Gleason Archer explains that some Muslim scholars attempt to normalize the Arabic term *Samariyyun* as part of ancient Egyptian vocabulary. Nevertheless, "Samaritans did not come into being as a race until after the sixth century B.C., and so there could have been no Samaritan around as early as 1445 B.C.! . . . The word 'Samaritan' appears in standard Arabic dictionaries as *Samariyyu*, spelled exactly the same as it is in this verse of Sura 20. There is no word or name like *Samiriyu* in the Egyptian lexicon."⁴² Many of the anachronistic issues in the Qur'an seem to indicate that Muhammad had a general but still confused knowledge of the Old and New Testament books. Religious studies scholars Kaltner and Frechette conclude from their analysis that "the Qur'an generally reflects some awareness of narrative biblical traditions. It presents them for its own purposes by highlighting certain details or introducing details lacking in the biblical narrative. . . . Sometimes this indicates an effort to make the story more Islamic."⁴³

Archer points out various additional problems with Qur'anic retellings of biblical narratives. In Surah 12.21–32 for example, Joseph goes to jail but it is not clear why since, unlike in the biblical account, Potiphar's wife admits publicly that her charges against Joseph were false.⁴⁴ In Surah 2.249, the account of Gideon's having his army drink from the river (Judges 7) is applied to Saul instead.⁴⁵

One of the most confusing issues is the identity of Mary in the Qur'an. It appears there may be a conflation between Miriam the sister of Moses and Mary the mother of Jesus as both names are *maryam* in Arabic. In Surah 66.12, Mary the mother of Jesus is named as "the daughter of Imran [Hebrew Amram]," who is named as the father of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron in the OT (Num 26:59). Interestingly, Mary is said to also be married to a man named Imran (Surah 3.35). The biblical account explains that Mary is married to Joseph, and they are both of the tribe of Judah (Matt 1:16; cf. Luke 3:23–82). Archer emphasizes that "Jesus' [earthly] mother and father both descended from Judah and not from Levi (as Amram and Miriam did)" as the Qur'an suggests by conflating Miriam with Mary.⁴⁶ From a Christian understanding, the change in lineage from Judah to Levi is an alarming attack on Jesus' claim to the Davidic throne and thus an essential part of his Messiahship. This doctrinal change about Jesus specifically appears to be more than just confusion. Even scholars Kaltner and Frechette point out that the "Qur'an does something regarding [Jesus] that it does not do in its interpretation of Hebrew Bible characters and stories—it flatly denies central Christian beliefs about Jesus."⁴⁷

⁴² Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 465.

⁴³ John Kaltner and Christopher G. Frechette, *How the Qur'an Interprets the Bible: Comparing Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Scriptures* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2020), 8–10.

⁴⁴ Archer, 463.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *How the Qur'an Interprets the Bible*, 13.

Chronology and Abrogation

Some object to the inerrancy of the Qur'an because of passages that contradict each other. Muslims explain these contradictions with the doctrine of abrogation. In Surah 2, Allah says that he will replace abrogated (i.e., cancelled) verses with better ones (Surah 2.106). The passages on abrogation often appeal to Allah's omniscience and omnipotence in connection with vindicating this doctrine and Muhammad's message (Surah 13.39; 6.38; 16.101). The latest verse chronologically abrogates any former revelation.

One significant example is the "satanic verses" in the Qur'an. The passage teaches that Muslims should appeal to three pagan goddesses instead of Allah, clearly contradicting the monotheism of Islam (53.19–25), and in Surah Hajj it is revealed to Muhammad that the verses were given by Satan instead (22.52–53). This incident is complicated for Islam, considering Islamic teaching on the infallibility of the prophets. Muslim scholarship teaches that "some verses describe a number of the prophets as *mukhlasin* (those who have been purified). For example, see 38.45–48. In these verses, one who is *mukhlis* is one who has not been and cannot be misguided by Satan."⁴⁸ The facts that the Qur'an claims that Muhammad was infallible (33.33) and that he was able to be influenced by Satan call into question Muhammad's infallibility and therefore the infallibility of the entire Qur'an, whether or not this section was abrogated in Surah 22.52–53.

Another example is Qur'anic teaching on Jews and Christians. The Qur'an teaches that "the believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians—whoever truly believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good will have their reward with their Lord" (2.62). However, after this text chronologically, the reader is told that "whoever seeks a way other than Islam, it will never be accepted from them, and in the Hereafter they will be among the losers" (3.85). In other words, if a person is not a Muslim (confesses the *shahada* and submits), he will not go to heaven. But the final passage chronologically (5.69) reverts almost word for word to the first statement in 2.62. Thus, the Qur'an contradicts itself in teaching that only Muslims go to heaven and that non-Muslims can also go to heaven.

This kind of issue causes doubt about the ability to trust the commands and theology in the Qur'an, especially considering that different scholars date the surahs and their sections differently. In his in-depth study of four major chronology lists of the surahs, Zwemer found that "by actual count there were sixty-five among a hundred and fourteen possible instances where *two* agreed. There were only five instances where three agreed on the order of certain chapters. There were forty-five instances where all disagreed, *and there was not a single instance where all were agreed* as to the place of a Surah in chronological order."⁴⁹ Abrogation depends on accurate knowledge of the chronology of the surahs, and the fact that there is no authoritative chronology calls into question not only abrogation but also the infallibility of the Qur'an in general. Additionally, abrogation extends to the accepted Hadiths because of the Qur'anic command to obey the example of Muhammad (24.54). Thus, the traditions of the Hadiths must also be factored in when making final determinations of Islamic doctrine.

⁴⁸ Tehrani, n.p.

⁴⁹ Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character, and Teachings of Jesus Christ according to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (New York: American Tract Society, 1919), 42–43.

Textual Transmission of the Qur'an

In contrast with their claims about the corruption of the Bible, Muslims claim the inerrant transmission of the Qur'an—from Muhammad's perfect memorization of every part of the Arabic message from God to the perfect recording of that memorized word as Muhammad dictated the message to his companions. The main Qur'anic verse that supports the idea of perfect preservation of the Qur'an is 15.9: "Lo! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian." Allah himself is supposed to have perfectly preserved the Qur'an.

The history of the transmission of the Qur'an certainly calls into question the reliability of the text. Muhammad himself apparently did not write the Qur'an or even a succession plan for after his death. The first caliph after Muhammad was Abu Bakr, whose daughter Aisha was the favored wife of Muhammad. Under Bakr's leadership, battles continued with those that opposed Islam. A man named Umar had been a companion of the Prophet, and one tradition says that "Umar, who himself was to succeed to the caliphate in 634, became worried at the fact that so many Muslims who had known the Koran by heart were killed during the Battle. . . . There was real danger that parts of the Koran [would be lost]."⁵⁰ So with Bakr's approval Umar commissioned another companion of Muhammad, Zaid, to collect bits of the Qur'an from random written scraps and from the memories of those he could ask.⁵¹ Various scholars question this account, however, arguing that the story about compilation under Abu Bakr was contrived to utilize the saintly reputation of Abu Bakr in order to make the recension under Uthman, the third caliph, look like a copying of the Zaid/Bakr copy.⁵²

In any case, the major recension of the Qur'an did take place under Uthman's leadership. The result was one standardized version, but the loss of the other textual witnesses since all variant forms were gathered and burned. To Nöldeke

it . . . seems . . . highly probable that this second redaction took this simple form: Zaid read off the codex which he had previously written, and his associates, simultaneously or successively, wrote one copy each to his dictation. These, I suppose, were the three copies which we are informed, were sent to the capitals Damascus, Basra, and Kufa, to be in the first instance standards for the soldiers of the respective provinces. A fourth copy would doubtless be retained at Medina. Be that as it may, it is impossible now to distinguish in the present form of the book what belongs to the first redaction from what is due to the second.⁵³

Whatever the process, "there are sufficient reasons for believing that the Koran as we have it today, though not necessarily falsified in any vicious sense, at any time, does not represent the *ipsissima verba* of Muhammad."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibn Warraq, "Introduction," in *Origins of the Koran*, 11.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See *ibid.*, 11–13; Leone Caetani, "'Uthman and the Recension of the Koran," in *Origins of the Koran*, 75.

⁵³ Nöldeke, "The Koran," 57.

⁵⁴ These are the words of R. F. McNeile in *Origins of the Koran*, 67, in summarizing Leone Caetani, "'Uthman and the Recension of the Koran," in *Origins of the Koran*, 67–75.

The belief in perfect preservation of the Qur'anic text depends on belief in the perfect memory of Muhammad, which at times appears to have failed him.⁵⁵ But according to the comprehensive manuscript study of Keith Small, “the available sources do not provide the necessary information for reconstructing the original text of the Qur'an from the time of Muhammad.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the claim of an unbroken version going back to Muhammad is not tenable. This doctrine also depends on the complete and inerrant gathering of sources by Zaid, Umar, and Uthman. There was no master manuscript from Muhammad to work from. Rather, according to Islamic scholar Alphose Mingana, “it is quite possible . . . that the only source which Zaid had for the greater part of the text was ‘the hearts of men’ and some scattered scraps of parchment.”⁵⁷ In addition, the Qur'an seems to suggest that there was corruption of the recitation even while Muhammad was alive.⁵⁸ How is anyone to know that none of those corrupted parts made their way into the final recension? One might suggest checking manuscript records, but unfortunately there are no manuscript records before Uthman to check. And it appears Uthman wanted it that way. Thus, the complicated textual transmission of the Qur'an calls into question the infallibility of the record of the text.

The Bible and Inerrancy

Like Muslim scholars, Bible scholars make the appeal for inerrancy as a deductive argument from the doctrine of inspiration and the nature of God. If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and completely truthful and the writing in question is a record of his inspired revelation, it follows that this writing will also exhibit complete truthfulness. However, biblical scholars land on a spectrum between full/unlimited inerrancy and partial/limited inerrancy. Because there is great variation in Christian belief about inerrancy due to perceived contradictions and/or inaccurate information in the Bible,⁵⁹ in the 1970s the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was formed, and it produced a summary statement on the doctrine of inerrancy:

⁵⁵ “In some instances, indeed, he may have relied too much on his memory. For example, he seems to have occasionally dictated the same sura to different persons in slightly different terms.” Nöldeke, “The Koran,” 40.

⁵⁶ *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts* (Lanham: Lexington, 2011), 183. See chapter 12 of this work for a complete description of the stages of textual development of the Qur'an.

⁵⁷ “Three Ancient Korans,” in *Origins of the Koran*, 84.

⁵⁸ “If we understand correctly the following verse of Suratul-Hijr (xv. 90-91): ‘As we sent down upon (punished) the dividers (of the Scripture?) who broke up the Koran into parts,’ we are tempted to state that, even when the Prophet was alive, some changes were noticed in the recital of certain verses of his sacred book. There is nothing very surprising in this fact, since Muhammad could not read nor write, and was at the mercy of friends for the writing of his revelations, or, more frequently, of some mercenary amanuenses.” Ibid.

⁵⁹ Erickson defines inerrancy as “the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings” (189). He goes on to explain that the term *infallibility* has also been applied to the Bible as a sort of limited belief in the truthfulness of Scripture: “‘infallibility’ has in recent years been used as an alternative to ‘inerrancy,’ meaning in some usages that the Bible was not necessarily accurate in all of its factual references, but that it accomplished the divine purpose [i.e., is accurate in redemptive truths only].” I take the “full inerrancy” approach described by Erickson: though the Bible “does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true” (191).

Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. . . . Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives. . . . The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded.⁶⁰

God's nature demands that his revelation be fully truthful, including on matters of science and history. Too many theologians sadly limit or disregard inerrancy because of perceived contradictions or perceived inaccurate scientific information. It has been clearly demonstrated time and again, however, that believers do not have to redefine the truth of Scripture in order to remain intellectually and logically satisfied, no matter what questions and arguments scholars push into the conversation.

Even though inerrancy is most clearly grounded in the doctrine of inspiration and the character of God, the doctrine is also drawn from direct statements in the Old and New Testaments about the nature of God's revelation.⁶¹ Jesus calls the Word of God the "truth" that sanctifies believers (John 17:17–19). Belief in the truthfulness of God's Word is what sets God's people apart (sanctifies them) from the world, and Jesus himself appeals to the unbreakable (i.e., completely reliable) nature of the Scriptures as the basis of his argument and the reason that the Jews should believe in him (John 10:35). The Psalms describe the revelation of God as "perfect," "sure," "right," "pure," and "true and righteous altogether" (Ps 19:7–9). A number of times the words of God are spoken of as "pure" (צָרִף and בָּרָא 2).⁶² The first term has the idea of trustworthiness demonstrated after trial under intense pressure, like a precious metal. The second means faultlessness or guiltlessness.⁶³

Regarding the nature of inerrancy, the biblical claims are similar to those of the Qur'an except in terms of the described effect on believers. As discussed previously, the claims of the truthfulness of the Qur'an focus almost completely on the truthfulness of the words and the responsibility of the hearers to respond. Yet the Bible's testimony to itself also speaks of the transforming power of God's words to fulfill the needs of every person (Ps 19:6) and to provide sure guidance for life because of the

⁶⁰ "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition," accessed August 24, 2025, <https://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

⁶¹ Without entering into a complex discussion of epistemology, this paper assumes that truth is knowable, that God has revealed truth about himself and the universe that is knowable by mankind, and that God holds people eternally accountable for the knowledge he has given even through general revelation (Rom 1:18–21). Every person not only *can* know but *does* know the truth about God already. Each person "holds [suppresses this] truth in unrighteousness" (v. 18).

⁶² צָרִף in 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps 17:31 (MT); Ps 119:140; and Prov 30:5. בָּרָא 2 in Ps 19:8.

⁶³ *The Lexham Research Lexicon* defines צָרִף as "to be worthy of trust or belief, conceived of as being refined or pure." Rick Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), s.v. "צָרִף." The definition given for בָּרָא 2 is as follows: "having no faults [or] . . . in a state of ritual cleanliness or free of guilt and sin." Ibid., s.v. "בָּרָא 2."

trustworthiness of God (Deut 32:4; Isa 25:1; Ps 40:11), and the focus of this testimony is on belief in Jesus Christ in the NT (John 1:14; 8:45; Eph 4:21).⁶⁴

The claim of biblical inerrancy is sound as long as there is no error found in the Old and New Testaments, right? But it is important to define what is an “error.” Geisler defines “error” as “something that is logically contradictory or else that does not correspond to the facts of the matter.” But he qualifies the definition in that “as long as it is *possible* that the original text did not have an error, it would not be *necessary* to give up inerrancy. Furthermore, the error would have to be more than an alleged or apparent one; it would have to be an *actual* error. This means there are no *possible* explanations for the alleged error.”⁶⁵ The previously cited anachronisms and contradictions in the Qur'an match this definition of error as there is no provable record back to the original manuscripts, and the only explanation of many contradictions is the convenient doctrine of abrogation.

But it is a legitimate question whether the Bible holds up to the same scrutiny. For example, parallel passages sometimes have differing details or apparent contradictions such as the case of the different wordings of the sign above the cross.⁶⁶ These kinds of discrepancies are usually not difficult to explain, however. Henry Morris explains that “John tells us (19:20) there were three inscriptions, in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, and it is possible they were each slightly different since the essential statement in each case would be simply ‘The King of the Jews.’ . . . Matthew would be likely to record the Hebrew inscription, Mark the Latin, and John the Greek. . . . Luke perhaps combined them.”⁶⁷ These differing ways of recording the inscription provide a plausible explanation of the differences in the texts.

Another example of apparent contradiction in the NT is whether Jesus told the disciples to take nothing except a staff (Mark 6:8–9) or *not* take a staff at all (Matt 10:10 and Luke 9:3). Since this more clearly exhibits logical contradiction (A and not A simultaneously), the difficulty is more alarming. Ahern suggests various linguistic harmonizations of the text by “correction of the text by double interpretation of the two commands.”⁶⁸ The verb in Matthew has the primary sense of acquisition, but the verb in Mark communicates retention. Thus, in the Luke and Matthew accounts, Christ is telling the disciples to buy nothing new for the journey, and in the Mark passage he is saying the same thing and telling them to use what staff they may already have. In any case, taking a staff or not on one journey of the apostles is nothing compared to the contradiction in the Qur'an about whether Christians will be included in those accepted into heaven or not, for example.

Some of the most troubling difficulties in the biblical text are the chronology and number reporting in the OT. For example, Erickson explains that “Stephen’s chronology of the Israelites’ stay

⁶⁴ Even a brief survey of the word *truth* in the KJV of the NT reveals that the word refers almost exclusively to belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁶⁵ Norman L. Geisler, “Biblical Inerrancy, Inductive or Deductive Basis: A Response to William Lane Craig,” in *Vital Issues in the Inerrancy Debate*, ed. F. David Farnell, et al. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 171.

⁶⁶ Matthew 27:37: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.” Mark 15:26: “The King of the Jews.” Luke 23:38: “This is the King of the Jews.” John 19:19: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

⁶⁷ Morris, *Many Infallible Proofs: Practical and Useful Evidences of Christianity* (San Diego: Christian Life, 1974), 226.

⁶⁸ Barnabas Ahern, “Staff or No Staff?,” *CBQ* 5, no. 3 (1943): 332–37.

in Egypt (they were enslaved for four hundred years—Acts 7:6) does not coincide with the account in Exodus. . . . In parallel passages, 2 Samuel 10:18 speaks of 700 chariots where 1 Chronicles 19:18 has 7,000.”⁶⁹ It is important, however, not to apply modern standards of data reporting to the ancient text. As Erickson points out, people make approximations in normal speech on a regular basis. On this principle, he argues that people should judge the assertions of the Bible “in accordance with the purpose for which they were written. . . . If the report is an official military document an officer is to submit to a superior, the number must be exact. That may be the only way to ascertain whether there were any deserters. If, on the other hand, the account is simply to give some idea of the size of the battle, then a round number like 10,000 is adequate, and in this setting is correct.”⁷⁰ In the example above with the discrepancy of 700 and 7,000, the answer may be as simple as William Arndt explains, that it is likely due to “the error of a scribe, who specially if letters were used as numerals could easily write seven thousand instead of seven hundred, or vice versa.”⁷¹ Works such as Arndt’s provide helpful scholarship to address such difficulties, and most are not difficult to explain given an appreciation for the context of each biblical passage in view.⁷²

The issue of scribal errors raises the question of textual transmission of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. While treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, some comparisons with the Qur’anic textual transmission history demonstrate the superiority of the biblical text’s claim to be true revelation from God. First, the biblical textual tradition demonstrates careful scribal work to accurately and precisely transmit the Scriptures from the beginning of their writing. Rooker explains that

the variant readings that do exist [in the OT] are certainly not so numerous as to destroy the text’s credibility. On the whole the incidents of scribal errors are very few. Ninety percent of the texts contain no variants, and none affects any doctrinal issue. . . . The same kind of variants we observe today existed in the first century, and yet Christ and the apostles did not waver in their clear affirmation of the authority of Scripture.⁷³

In contrast with the Qur’an, careful documentation rather than oral tradition transmitted the OT text. In addition, there are so many copies of manuscripts and such careful records of textual errors that mistakes can be tracked down through comparative study of the manuscripts. For this reason, the

⁶⁹ Erickson, 198.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁷¹ William Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself? A Discussion of Alleged Contradictions in the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 34.

⁷² For other helpful resources on this topic, see Gleason L. Archer Jr., *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); and Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

⁷³ Mark F. Rooker, “The Transmission and Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” in Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 109–110.

variant manuscripts are a healthy part of the biblical textual transmission rather than a liability. Such comparative study of the Qur'an meets a point of impossibility because of the destruction of all variant manuscripts by Uthman mentioned previously. In contrast, Rooker points out that "scribes are mentioned as early as the time of David and Solomon as part of the royal chanceries (2 Sam 8:16–18; 1 Kgs 4:1–6)." More specifically, Israelite scribes "indicated errors by dotting letters above the script or alternatively they made corrections in the margin. Their main task was to preserve the text by faithfully copying the Hebrew manuscripts."⁷⁴ The preservation of the original text was of ultimate priority, and the scribes left a paper trail so that a reconstruction of the text remained possible.

The testimony of the NT textual tradition is equally impressive. Carson and Moo counter the view that "there was a long period of oral tradition before anything substantial about Jesus or the early church was written down. The evidence is against such a stance: the world into which Jesus was born was highly literate."⁷⁵ The Gospels of Matthew and John were written by apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus and the events of his life.⁷⁶ Luke interviewed eyewitnesses and took pains to explain that he carefully documented these accounts (Luke 1:1–2). Though "most early Christian copies of the New Testament were doubtless done by laypeople . . . of all the works that have come down to us from the ancient world, the New Testament is the most amply attested in textual evidence."⁷⁷ Whereas an unbroken chain of manuscript tradition going back to Muhammad for the Qur'an is unavailable, the overwhelming amount of manuscripts provide what is needed to reconstruct the original biblical text.

Conclusion

Christian students find Islamic revelatory claims very distinct from the biblical narrative. Muhammad asserts that he received a revelation from God that is inimitable, a recitation in Arabic and coeternal with Allah. Muslim scholarship is diverse in its interpretation of the surahs and agrees that the text is often vague. The pre-Islamic Scriptures are supposed to confirm the Qur'an. However, the differences in accounts of major events and doctrinal points make a reconciliation between the two difficult unless corruption of the pre-Islamic Scriptures can be substantiated. The Qur'an claims that its words and the prophets are infallible, but there are various historical, scientific, and textual issues that cause doubt about these claims. Because of these issues, Allah appears to contradict himself at will. And the fact that a large portion of the Qur'an deals with a reinterpretation of the pre-Islamic Scriptures and lacks evidence of biblical corruption seems to indicate that perhaps the Qur'an is the source "concealing" the truth of the earlier revelation.

The Bible presents mankind with a fundamentally different religious idea than the works-based religions of the world, including Islam. The library of the two Testaments testifies of its divine inspiration to tell the story of the salvation of mankind through the Messiah and Son of God, Jesus

⁷⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁵ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 24.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 140–49 and 229–30.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

Christ. The manuscript tradition presents a remarkable wealth of knowledge to reconstruct the original text and faithfully communicate a record of the message of the original. Has God spoken through Muhammad? Muhammad may have spoken on God's behalf, but that does not mean he spoke at God's request. God has spoken in these last days through his Son, Jesus Christ.