

The Case for an Imperfect Qur'an

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Qur'an Thought to Be a Perfect Book

Muslims believe God has supernaturally revealed his will to mankind. In this way, they are like Christians and Jews who came before them. All three religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—believe their founders collected and recorded divine revelation from God into written form. The primary sacred book for Muslims is called the Qur'an. When compared to the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'an is by far the shorter of the three holy books. It is one-fifth the size of the Old Testament and half the size of the New Testament. Yet, for Muslims, the Qur'an is by far the most important. It is thought to be God's *final* revelation given to mankind for all time. It is believed this book (1) came from God, (2) was perfectly received by Muhammad, and (3) has been perfectly transmitted throughout history until today. For this reason, Muslims think the book they have in their hands today, the Qur'an, is a perfect book.

Perfect Reception. This revelation is said to have been verbally dictated over twenty-two years to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel from a perfect copy of an uncreated and eternal Qur'an in heaven. Some believe God put Muhammad into a revelatory trance by completely suspending Muhammad's cognitive faculties.¹ His role was merely being a passive human recipient of Gabriel's words.² Regardless of how it was done, Muslims believe he perfectly received the revelation, and then memorized it by heart.³ "Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad reviewed the Qur'an with the Angel Gabriel once each year and twice in the last year of his life."⁴ This

¹ Shabbir Akhtar, *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2009), 127, 128. In Richard Shumack, *The Wisdom of Islam and the Foolishness of Christianity* (Sydney: Island View Publishing, 2014), Kindle loc. 3210-3213.

² Richard Shumack, *The Wisdom of Islam and the Foolishness of Christianity* (Sydney: Island View Publishing, 2014), Kindle loc. 701.

³ That many Muslims believe Muhammad was the first to memorize the Qur'an can be seen from him being listed first in "List of People Who Memorized the Quran," Wikipedia, April 24, 2019, accessed May 11, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_who_memorized_the_Quran.

⁴ James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Quran* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2013), Kindle loc. 3289.

‘inerrant reception’ by Muhammad of God’s exact words is an argument given for the superiority of Islam. According to one Muslim apologist:

The most important distinction between the Qur’an and all other words or writings therefore is that the Qur’an is *the speech from Allah*, revealed in its *precise meaning and wording* through the Angel Gabriel...⁵

Perfect Transmission. After Muhammad received it, he then passed it along to his followers, who also memorized it as they recited it.⁶ But in time, the number of early followers who memorized the Qur’an began to die. The oral message was written down to preserve it in written form—and this is the book known as the Qur’an today. The written Qur’an we have today is said to be a perfect copy of the heavenly original—it is claimed there are no variations. The Qur’an we have today is thought to be just as perfect as the original revealed to Muhammad thirteen centuries ago. This ‘perfect transmission’ is also given as evidence for the superiority of Islam. One website reads, “The Book has been handed down to our age in its *complete and original form* since the time of Prophet Muhammad...”⁷ Another says, “the text of the Qur’an, once revelation had ceased, has remained the same to this day.”⁸ And yet another:

the Holy Qur’an is the only divinely revealed scripture in the history of mankind which has been preserved to the present time *in its exact original form*... the Qur’an has been preserved in the Arabic wording in which it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad...⁹

Muslims believe this preservation extends down to the smallest unit of sound.¹⁰ “It is an incontrovertible historical truth that the text of the Glorious Quran extant today is, syllable for

⁵ Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulum Al-Qurān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qurān* (Leicestershire (U.K.): Islamic Foundation, 2015), 10, emphasis mine.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷ “The Preservation of the Glorious Quran,” Why Islam? November 9, 2014, <https://www.whyislam.org/on-faith/the-preservation/>, emphasis mine.

⁸ Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulum Al-Qurān*, 28.

⁹ Suzanne Haneef, *What Everyone Should Know about Islam and Muslims* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2007), 18, 19 in Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 187, emphasis mine.

¹⁰ The Qur’an was initially orally transmitted. Syllables are the smallest unit of pronunciation for words.

syllable, exactly the same as the Prophet (p) had offered to the world as the Word of God.”¹¹ Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) claimed it was a dogma of belief among the four hundred million Muslims of his day that “the Qur’an is one, and [there is] no copy differing in even a diacritical point...”¹² The Qur’an itself makes the claim that it would be perfectly preserved throughout time: “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption).” (Yusuf Ali, 15:9)

Problems with a ‘perfect Qur’an.’ There are serious challenges for anyone who believes the Qur’an we have today is a perfect book. This paper is a summary of the top ten challenges. It will cover these points: (1) There is evidence of Qur’anic textual variants. (2) The Qur’an seems to misrepresent Christian doctrine. (3) It draws from fake or legendary writings. (4) It asserts that Christians have changed the text of the Old and New Testaments while there is strong evidence otherwise. (5) Passages in the Qur’an which are about the same events have conflicting details. (6) It wrongly ascribes biblical prophecies to Muhammad. (7) Its eloquence has been challenged. (8) The so-called ‘Satanic verses’ cast doubt on its origin. (9) The Qur’an does not seem to follow the prophet / miracle pattern established in the Old and New Testaments. And (10) there is strong evidence for Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, and this conflicts with the Qur’an. In short, there is much evidence which challenges the belief in a perfect Qur’an.

Problem 1. Evidence for Textual Variants

While the Qur’an was initially an oral message, there were some people in the beginning who wrote verses on paper and leather, even bone fragments and palm leaves.¹³ After Muhammad died, Abu Bakr (AD 573-634), Muhammad’s father-in-law and Islam’s second

¹¹ “The Preservation of the Glorious Quran,” Why Islam? November 9, 2014, <https://www.whyyislam.org/on-faith/the-preservation/>.

¹² Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ* (Lahore: The Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Ishaat-i-Islam, 1921), 7 in Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 187.

¹³ Bugra Ekinci, “History of the Compilation of Quran,” Daily Sabah, June 2, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/feature/2017/06/02/history-of-the-compilation-of-quran>.

caliph, became concerned that many who had memorized the Qur'an died in battle.¹⁴ So he commissioned a group of people to go around and collect whatever writings they could find into a single book. However, "due to the vague nature of the Arabic script that was used at this time," people began to read from this book in different dialects.¹⁵ These pronunciations in different dialects resulted in different meanings of the text. This became a concern for Islam's third caliph, Uthman (AD 577-656), Muhammad's son-in-law and companion. Uthman declared that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad by Gabriel in Muhammad's own dialect (the dialect of the Quraysh tribe) and that only this version should be read. He then destroyed all copies in other dialects. In this way, he produced the Uthman version of the Qur'an, and this became the standard version.

Evidence burned. The above account of the Qur'an's history is generally accepted by all Muslims. It presents a picture where all the manuscripts in Muhammad's dialect perfectly agreed, were collected, and then codified. The challenge with corroborating the above is that Uthman thoroughly destroyed all known text in his day which he considered to be non-canonical. We have descriptions of this purging process. One good example is from the *hadith*.¹⁶

Uthman then ordered... "In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Quran, then write it in the dialect of Quraish, the Quran was revealed in their tongue." They did so... *Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.*¹⁷

Another account comes from a Christian apologist named Al Kindi (d. AD 873) who gives valuable insight into how Uthman destroyed these other texts. They were to be "shredded and boiled in vinegar till they were sodden, nothing remained, not even the smallest fragment that

¹⁴ A caliph is the highest leader in Islam.

¹⁵ Samuel Green, "The Different Arabic Versions of the Qur'an," Answering Islam, last modified March 7, 2016, <https://www.answering-islam.org/Green/seven.htm>.

¹⁶ The *hadith* are commentaries on the Qur'an.

¹⁷ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 6, book 61, number 510, emphasis mine. Muslims regard Sahih al-Bukhari to be one of the most reliable *hadith* (commentaries) on the Qur'an.

could be deciphered.”¹⁸ By all accounts, Uthman did an extraordinary job destroying manuscripts he disagreed with.

Pre-Uthman text. Despite Uthman’s best attempts, we have recently discovered text that survived his purging. Some pages apparently were not destroyed, but the text was washed away, and new text was written on top of it. These types of manuscripts are called palimpsests. Using modern technology, we can read the original text that was washed away. Significant problems arise with the narrative above when this original text is compared to Uthman’s final version.

Textual variants. The Sana’a palimpsest is one such discovery. It is also one of the oldest Qur’anic manuscripts. There is a strong chance (75.1%) that the parchment dates to before AD 646.¹⁹ The upper text of this palimpsest follows the standard Uthman rendering. However, the lower text (what was washed away) differs from Uthman’s final text. There are verses where there are many slight differences which agree with other *hadith*, but not Uthman.²⁰ The Bonhams palimpsest, dated AD 621 to 670 from Western Arabia, likely belongs to the same manuscript codex.²¹ However, it also shows differences. “The text of the *scriptio inferior* [original text] is different from the standard text of ‘Uthman.”²² There are about thirty variant readings.²³ There

¹⁸ Newman, N. A., ed. *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries, 632-900 A.D.; Translations with Commentary* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research, 1994), 455-459 in White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Quran*, Kindle location 3557. Newman’s book is out of print and very expensive. However, a copy of this text can be found at “The Apology of Al-Kindi,” *Syriac Studies*, May 9, 2012, <http://www.syriacstudies.com/2012/05/09/the-apology-of-al-kindi-by-anton-tiendialogue-abd-al-mash-b-ishaq-al-kind/>.

¹⁹ This is extremely early—for reference, Muhammad died in AD 632 and Uthman reigned from 644-656.

²⁰ Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurān of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57, no. 4 (January 1, 2010): 343-436, <https://archive.org/details/130854520TheCodexOfACompanionOfTheProphetSAWBenhamSadeghiBergmann>, 361, 362.

²¹ “Codex Ṣan‘ā’ I – a Qur’ānic Manuscript from Mid-1st Century of Hijra,” *Islamic Awareness*, last modified February 16, 2019, <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/soth.html>.

²² Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R Puin, ed., *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research Into Its Early History* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009), 314, <https://archive.org/details/TheHiddenOriginsOfIslamNewResearchIntoItsEarlyHistory>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 314-317.

are different words, omission of words and phrases, as well as different sequence of words. Another, the Fogg's palimpsest, shows "different words, added expressions, and omitted words..."²⁴ There is also evidence of an intentional change in 2:217 where "from your faith" was dropped from "until they turn you back *from your faith*."²⁵ This change would seem to be an attempt to motivate men for battle. The Topkapi Manuscript is another very early manuscript with forty-four textual variants.²⁶ This evidence suggests Uthman was faced with far more difficulty that merely choosing between different dialects—he had to choose between many textual variants.

Confused by Uthman's compilation. Some early Muslim followers were confused with Uthman's final copy. Aisha, Muhammad's very own wife, said two-thirds of Surah 33 were omitted: "A'isha ... said, 'Surat al-Ahzab (xxxiii) used to be recited in the time of the Prophet with two hundred verses, but when Uthman wrote out the codices he was unable to procure more of it than there is in it today [73 verses].'"²⁷ She also said that a verse about stoning and breastfeeding went missing.²⁸ And, "The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers" is missing the phrase, "and he is a father of them."²⁹ Ibn Umar, the son of the second caliph, seems to lament the fact that much of the spoken Qur'an was lost in Uthman's final version. In his words, "Let none of you say, 'I have learned the whole of the Koran,' for how does he know what the whole of it is, *when much of it has disappeared?*"³⁰ All

²⁴ Ibid., 318.

²⁵ Ibid., 323.

²⁶ White, Kindle loc. 3655.

²⁷ Abu Ubaid, *Kitab Fada'il-al-Qur'an* in David Wood, "Has the Qur'an Been Perfectly Preserved?," North American Mission Board, March 30, 2016, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics-blog/has-the-qur-an-been-perfectly-preserved/>.

²⁸ Sunan Ibn Majah in David Wood, "Has the Qur'an Been Perfectly Preserved?"

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

one could say, according to Ibn Umar, was, “I have learned what is extant [still in existence] thereof.”³¹ These statements make good sense after considering the pre-Uthman textual variants above. Muslim’s today who believe in a ‘perfect Quran’ that is perfect in transmission will find it very difficult to wrestle with this evidence. However, it gets worse. The above covers the gap from Muhammad to Uthman but there are also serious challenges with the gap between Uthman to today.

From Uthman to today. There is a complex and evolving history of the Qur’an from Uthman to today. After Uthman compiled his text, people *continued* to read Uthman’s Qur’an with different pronunciations. Over time, these pronunciations began to be a problem again, as faulty readings increased. Then, in AD 934, an Islamic scholar named Abu Bakr Ibn Mujāhid declared seven of these reading systems (*qira*) to be canonical (eventually this would expand to ten). Anybody reciting a non-canonical version would be forced to recant. Yet, by the time the twentieth century comes around, there were still eight different ways to read each of these ten *qira*—making a total of eighty different ways to read ‘the Qur’an.’ Then, in 1924, one of these readings was selected, the *qira’a of Hafs* read by a man named ‘an Asim. They created an ancient looking font and began printing and distributing the first printed Qur’ans. Today, most of the Muslim world (97%) uses the 1924 Egyptian standard edition which is based on the Hafs version. “Minor adjustments were subsequently made to this text in following editions, one published later in 1924 and another in 1936.”³² With so many readings and revisions, it becomes difficult to defend the idea of ‘the Qur’an’ as a single book.

To conclude my first point, those who speak about the Qur’an being ‘a perfect book’ with perfect reception and perfect transmission would seem to be glossing over its complex and evolving history.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’an in its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2 in Samuel Green, “The Preservation of the Qur’an,” Answering Islam, last modified November, 2016, <https://www.answering-islam.org/Green/uthman.htm>.

Problem 2. Qur'an Misrepresents Christian Doctrine

If the Qur'an were a perfect book, then it would accurately represent the teachings of Christianity. Instead, it seems to misrepresent the established, well-known Christian doctrine of its day.

Problem with the Trinity. The Qur'an seems to misrepresent the Christian Trinity. At first glance, it seems to define the Trinity as Father, Son, and *Mary* (wife). This sketch can be seen from several passages.³³ Perhaps the most concerning for Muslims is 5:116 where the Qur'an places Mary among the false gods: "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'... Worship Allah..." And in 72:3 it says in response to the Christians that God "has not taken a wife or a son." It seems to present a view of the Trinity where God the Father took a wife, had physical relations with her, and produced a son. The problem with this is that at no time has the Christian church ever held this position. It is reasonable to think that if the Qur'an were the Word of God, then it would accurately represent the beliefs against which it speaks. In White's words,

We simply must insist that if its author believed Christians hold to three gods, Allah, Mary, and evidently their offspring, Jesus, then the Qur'an is the result of human effort, is marked by ignorance and error, and so is not what Muslims claim it to be.³⁴

The doctrine of the Trinity was well-known. Muhammad lived from AD 571 to 632. By this time, there had already been five ecumenical councils (see Table 1). In AD 325, two and a half centuries before Muhammad was born, the church confirmed that Jesus was not a separate, lesser God from the Father, but was "of the same substance." The Holy Spirit was proclaimed deity a few years later in AD 381—not Mary. As far as Mary was concerned, she was named the 'Mother of God' in AD 431. But this was in the strict sense that she was the 'God-bearer;' that is, the baby she bore was already God. And this was really to combat adoptionism, the idea that Jesus became God after he was born.

³³ For detailed coverage, see chapter four in White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Quran*.

³⁴ White, Kindle loc. 1269-1271.

Table 1. Well-known conclusions of the Christian councils before Muhammad's time

#	Name	Date	Results (Not Exhaustive)
1	First Council of Nicea	AD 325	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One God (Jesus not a lesser God, condemning Arianism). • Christ is divine, of the same nature as the Father.
2	First Council of Constantinople	AD 381	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deity of the Holy Spirit proclaimed.
3	Council of Ephesus	AD 431	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ was one person with two natures: fully human and fully divine (condemning Nestorianism). • Said Mary was the 'God-bearer' or the 'mother of God' (Θεοτόκος); Did not say <i>Mary</i> is God, but that <i>baby Jesus</i> was fully God even in the womb (condemning idea Jesus later become God at his baptism).
4	Council of Chalcedon	AD 451	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaffirmed three previous councils. • Reaffirmed Christ has two natures (not one or even mixed natures like the Eutychians/monophysites were teaching)
5	Second Council of Constantinople	AD 553	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condemned heretical views about Christ's nature: Arianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, monophysitism and adoptionism. • Perpetual virginity of Mary; Said Mary was always a virgin—not just before but even after Jesus was born. (Protestants reject this; cf. Mk. 6:3 and Mt. 13:55-56).

These discussions were not trivial. But the council members *systematically* evaluated questionable teaching of their day as it arose—teaching like Arianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, monophysitism and adoptionism. The result is that by the time Muhammad was born, the doctrine of the Trinity had been well worked through and the position of the church was well-known. The church did not believe in three separate Gods. Neither was Mary ever considered to be a member of the Trinity. The Qur'an would seem to be misrepresenting Christian dogma here. If so, this would be strong evidence for the fallibility of the Qur'an.

Muslim apologists typically find two ways out of this problem. First, some Muslims say that the Qur'an is not addressing *all* Christians, but the Nestorians.³⁵ However, the problem with this is Nestorians did not actually believe Mary was a member of the Trinity. Other Muslims say the Qur'an is referring to a small Christian sect called the Collyridians (4th c. AD) which evidently worshipped Mary. But if this were true it would be rather odd that a perfect book would make its strongest anti-Christian arguments against a very small minority sect which was already stamped out by Muhammad's day. As one Christian writer put it, if the Qur'an were addressing a minority sect here then "the Quran does not anywhere condemn the actual Trinitarian perspective of the mainstream Christians!"³⁶ For a comparison, imagine if the Christian scriptures were to contain a handful of passages that argued against the *pantheism* of Islam. Muslims would rightly respond that they do not believe in pantheism—this is a mistake. Christians would respond by saying the Bible is speaking of a small sect called Sufism. This would be a very odd scenario and a very unsatisfying answer! A more likely scenario is that the Qur'an is really speaking generally of all Christians, and that this is a misrepresentation.

Problem with Christian monotheism. Christians believe in *one* God who manifests himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not an affirmation of *three* different gods, but *one* God (monotheism). Early Christian council members were careful to avoid any language that led to tri-theism, which is the belief that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate gods. Christians by Muhammad's day had long ratified the doctrine of the Trinity to be one God, in three distinct persons. For example, the Athanasian Creed (5th c.) declared church dogma to be "...the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet

³⁵ "Tanwîr Al-Miqbâs Min Tafâsîr Ibn 'abbâs," The Tafâsîr, accessed May 16, 2019, 4:171, <https://www.altafasir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=4&tAyahNo=171&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>.

³⁶ Luke Wayne, "Did the Author of the Quran Understand the Trinity?," CARM, January 22, 2018, <https://carm.org/did-the-author-of-the-quran-understand-the-trinity>.

they are not three Gods, but one God.”³⁷ However, the Qur’an seems to suggest that Christians believe in three separate deities, viz., tri-theism. One such passage is:

Allah has not taken any son, *nor has there ever been with Him any deity*. [If there had been], then *each deity* would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others. Exalted is Allah above what they describe [concerning Him]. (23:91, emphasis mine)

Another passage that speaks about Christians is, “They have certainly disbelieved who say, ‘Allah is the third of three [i.e., deities].’ And there is no god except one God.” (5:73) And yet another is, “And do not say, ‘Three’; desist... Indeed, Allah is but one God.” (4:171)

Problem with the hypostatic union. Long before Muhammad, Christians affirmed the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus (this is called the hypostatic union) at the councils of Ephesus (AD 431) and Chalcedon (AD 451). They concluded that Jesus’ divine nature was united to a fully human nature at his incarnation. The problem with this as it relates to the Qur’an is that the Qur’an seems to be unaware that Christians believed Jesus was fully human. It seems to say that Christians thought Jesus was God but not a man.³⁸

The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his [Jesus’] mother was a supporter of truth. They both [i.e., Jesus and Mary] *used to eat food*. Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded. (5:75, emphasis mine)

It is easy to miss what this verse is saying. The point the Qur’an seems to be making here is that Jesus ate food—hence he was merely human and not divine. But again, the problem here is Christians did not believe Jesus was just divine. Christians in Muhammad’s day believed Jesus to be fully human too, and that as a human, he needed to eat food like any other human.

To conclude point two, there is evidence showing the Qur’an misrepresents the dogma of the Christian church. This dogma was well-known in Muhammad’s day. Surely if the Qur’an were a perfect book from God it would present the teaching of its opponents accurately.

³⁷ “Athanasian Creed,” *Historic Creeds and Confessions*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 1997).

³⁸ The Qur’an also seems to suggest the same for Mary—i.e., that she also ate is evidence she was merely human and not a deity. The Qur’an here seems to be suggesting that Christians thought Mary was a deity.

Problem 3. Qur'an Quotes from Fake Writings

There are several passages in the Qur'an which quote from legendary gospels and other spurious writings. In short, the events they described were fake—they did not happen.

The legendary Arabic Infancy Gospel. According to the Qur'an, the infant Jesus said the following while “in the cradle of a child” (19:29; cf. 5:110):

Indeed, I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet... And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive. (19:30, 33)

There is no mention of such an event in the four canonical gospels of the New Testament. Yet it bears a striking resemblance to this passage from the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*:

...Jesus spoke, and, indeed, when He was lying in His cradle said to Mary His mother: “I am Jesus, the Son of God, the Logos, whom thou hast brought forth, as the Angel Gabriel announced to thee; and my Father has sent me for the salvation of the world.”³⁹

The legendary Infancy Gospel of Thomas. There is an allusion to the spurious *Gospel of Thomas* where the child Jesus made clay birds:

... Allah will say, “O Jesus, Son of Mary, remember... when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission...” (Q 5:110)

Like the previous, there is no mention of this in the New Testament. But it is found here in the legendary gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* (2nd c. AD):

This child Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the ford of a mountain stream... having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows... And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off crying. And the Jews seeing this were amazed, and went away and reported to their chief men what they had seen Jesus doing.⁴⁰

³⁹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour,” *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, trans. Alexander Walker, vol. 8, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 405.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.

Quotations from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. There is a passage in the Quran where it says Mary

...withdrew with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said, "Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten." But he called her from below her, "Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream. And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates." (Q 19:22-25)

Again, this is not contained in any gospel, but it is found in the spurious Pseudo-Matthew (AD 600-625):

And it came to pass on the third day of their journey, while they were walking, that the blessed Mary was fatigued by the excessive heat of the sun in the desert; and seeing a palm tree, she said to Joseph: Let me rest a little under the shade of this tree... she looked up to the foliage of the palm, and saw it full of fruit, and said to Joseph: I wish it were possible to get some of the fruit of this palm... Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit. And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed.⁴¹

The evidence here suggests the Qur'an is alluding to this account from this fake gospel.

All these quotations or allusions to legendary events are problematic for anybody holding the Qur'an to be perfect.

Problem 4. The Bible's Original Message Is Not Corrupted

Muslims believe the original message of the Bible was Islam, and that Jews and Christians have completely corrupted this message. *Tahrif* is the official term. It is the belief that the actual text of the Bible or at least the meaning of the text has been corrupted. One Muslim apologist puts it this way:

The first five books of the Old Testament do not constitute the original Torah, but parts of the Torah have been mingled up with other narratives written by human beings and the original guidance of the Lord is lost in that quagmire. Similarly the four Gospels of Christ

⁴¹ Ibid., 376–377.

are not the original Gospels as they came from the prophet Jesus... the original Word of God is preserved neither with the Jews nor with the Christians.⁴²

The Qur'an itself makes this accusation by saying unbelievers "change words from their context" (5:13) and have perverted the text: "Now [O Muslims], do you then hope that they [Jews] will believe in you, when some of them have already heard the word of Allah and *knowingly perverted it*, after they had understood its meaning?" (2:75; cf. 3:78)

Examples of perverted teaching. What are some examples of perverted biblical teaching the Qur'an refers to? It would be belief in the Trinity, belief Jesus is the Son of God, belief in the sinfulness of man, the substitutionary atonement, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

Table 2 shows a contrast between the beliefs of Christianity and Islam. Since Muslims claim to also believe in the prophets of the Old and New Testament eras, the only logical conclusion for them as to why Christians have such different beliefs is that Christians have either modified the original biblical texts or take them completely out of context. Table 3 shows the challenges with this strong accusation. It would be quite an enormous claim to say Scripture *has* been preserved but that *all* Scripture from which Christian doctrine has been derived is taken out of context. It would require going through all New Testament and Old Testament Scripture as we have it today, and one would quickly see how this would contradict the Qur'an.

Table 2. Vastly different conclusions drawn from OT and Gospels

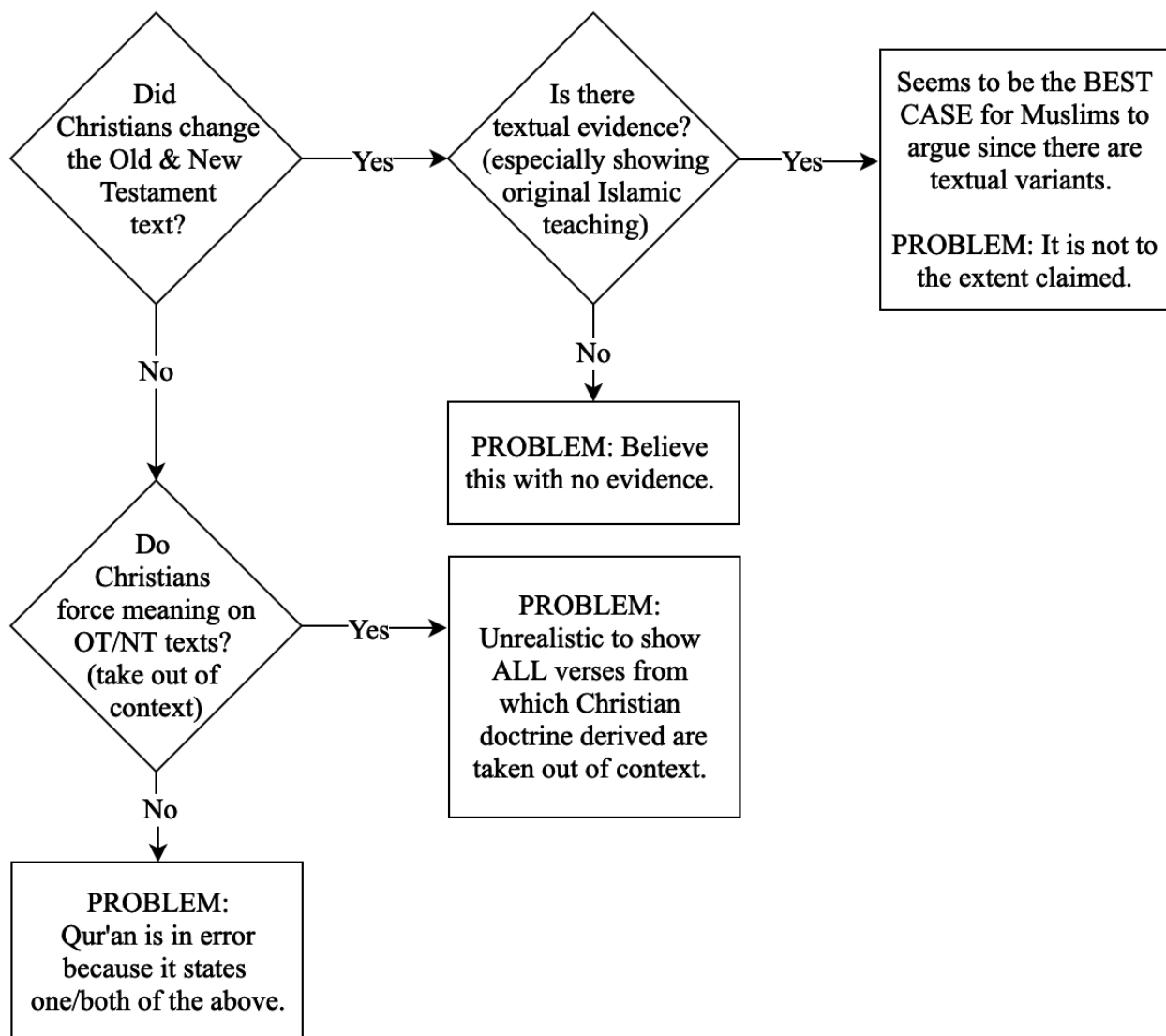
	Christianity	Islam
God	A tri-unity; one in essence; three in person.	Strict monotheism. No partner is to be associated with God.
Humanity	Sinful by nature.	Good by nature.
Sin	Sin is fatal (Rom. 6:23, Eph. 2:1). It reflects an attitude of moral rebellion against the holy God, which causes us to be alienated from him. An atonement is necessary.	Sin is thought of in terms of rejecting right guidance. It can be forgiven through repentance. No atonement is necessary.

⁴² Muslim apologist Ajjola in Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Things You Need to Know about Islam* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), 98.

Salvation	Based on resting in Christ's finished work (Matt. 11:29-30). Standard for righteousness is the absolute holiness of God (Rom. 3:23). Salvation can only be received through faith (Rom. 5:1).	Based on works. The standard for salvation is having one's good deeds outweigh the bad. Therefore, it is based on human effort.
Bible	Authentic. Divinely inspired. The final authority in all matters of faith and truth.	Corrupted. Corrected by the Qur'an.
Jesus	The one and only Son of God. John wrote, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn. 20:31).	Muslims affirm the virgin birth of Jesus and the miracles that he performed. But he is just one of the prophets. To associate Jesus with God (i.e., to call Him the Son of God) is blasphemy.
Resurrection	Jesus died a physical death as a substitute for our sins. He then rose from the dead in a physical but immortal body and appeared to hundreds of witnesses (1 Cor. 15). God's specific purpose for sending Jesus into the world was for him to be crucified and to die for our sins (Mt. 20:28; Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). Jesus voluntarily gave his life for us (Jn. 6:51; 10:11-17). The end was not that of dishonor but that of the highest exaltation (Acts 2:29-33; 5:30-31; Phil. 2:8-11).	According to Islamic tradition, Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead, he went to heaven, and Judas died in His place on the cross. Muslims believe that it is disrespectful to believe that God would allow one of his prophets—and especially one of the most honored of the prophets—to be crucified.

It is well-known that there are New Testament textual variants. Therefore, the best case for Muslims would be to argue Christians have deliberately modified the text. However, as will be shown next, this is also a difficult challenge for Muslims since these textual variants are not to the extent claimed. Instead, a strong case can be made for the reliability of Scripture. For the sake of simplicity our study will be limited to just the New Testament scriptures. Furthermore, if the Qur'an says the text of the Bible has been corrupted or taken out of context, and it can be shown that it has not been corrupted, then the Qur'an would be in error—it would not be a perfect book.

Table 3. Challenges with saying Christians have corrupted the Bible



Reliability of New Testament Documents

Here is a brief summary why Christians believe they have a very strong case for the reliability of the New Testament documents.

Gospels as eyewitness testimony. First, the Gospels were either from dedicated eyewitnesses or associates of eyewitnesses of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ. John and Matthew were Jesus' disciples (1 Jn. 1:1); Mark wrote Peter's gospel from notes taken while listening to Peter (1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16). Luke wrote Paul's gospel following very careful

research (Lk. 1:1-4). The gospels are first-hand, eyewitness testimony from people very close to the actual events that took place.

Not enough time for legends. Legends take centuries to form—they would have to form long after the eyewitnesses die. But there is evidence the Gospels were all written soon after the events they speak about. If Jesus were crucified in AD 34, then two of the Gospels, John and Matthew, could have been as early as six years from the time of Christ. The extremely liberal scholar, John A.T. Robinson, dated Matthew between AD 40 to about AD 60, John to about AD 40 to 65AD, Mark to about AD 45 to AD 60 and Luke to before AD 57 to 60AD.⁴³ Liberal archaeologist William F. Albright said, “there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80.”⁴⁴

Manuscripts are more numerous than any other. There are more manuscripts for the New Testament than any other book in antiquity. When it comes to manuscript attestation, the New Testament is in a class all by its own. There are over 5,800 partial and complete copies of the original Greek manuscripts. There are also early translations into Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, etc. which add another 19,000 copies. There are 36,289 quotations by the early church fathers. If it were necessary, there are so many quotations, it would be possible to reconstruct every book and chapter of New Testament from the church fathers. In terms of attestation, the next best is Homer’s *Iliad* (643 manuscripts), Demosthenes (200), Herodotus (8) and Plato (7).⁴⁵

Early and wide circulation. These numerous New Testament manuscripts had early and wide circulation. The earliest undisputed manuscript is the John Ryland Papyri (P52) dated AD 117-138. Its discovery location in Egypt suggests it had been in circulation for quite some time.

⁴³ Norman L. Geisler, “New Testament, Dating Of,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 529.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 529.

⁴⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Introduction, Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), 439.

It also suggests an original date of composition in the first century AD, consistent with the statements from liberal scholars Robinson and Albright.

Luke as a first-class historian. Luke wrote Acts with great accuracy and care (Lk. 1:1-4). The 1st century scholar, Colin J. Hemer, confirmed nearly a hundred details in Acts to be without a single error. Here are some examples: Luke correctly described named ports (Acts 13:4-5); said Lycaonian was the language spoken in Lystra (14:11); mentioned the cultural association of the gods Zeus and Hermes (14:12); gave the correct order of approach from the Cilician Gates (Derbe first, then Lystra, 16:1; 15:41); correctly described Philippi as Roman colony (16:12); mentioned the altar to an “unknown god” (17:23); said Ananias was high priest at that time (23:2); and gave the right route to sail in view of the winds (27:7).⁴⁶ Luke, who carefully wrote Acts, also wrote the gospel of Luke with great accuracy and care (Acts 1:1-2).

Accuracy of biblical text transmission. Critics claim that up to thirty-five (35%) of the New Testament text has been corrupted. But it is the consensus among professional scholars that we can know its accuracy to ninety-nine (99%) certainty. For example, Westcott and Hort estimated the text to be 98.33% pure, Ezra Abbott 99.75% and A. T. Robertson 99.9%.⁴⁷ With very few exceptions, mistakes are minor and do not have any significant impact on the text.

In conclusion, if the New Testament is reliable, and the evidence above seems to suggest it is, then the Qur’an is mistaken when it says that Christians have changed the text.

Problem 5. Parallel Passages Conflicting Details

One would expect that if the Qur’an were a perfect book, dictated word-for-word by Gabriel to Muhammad, then when the same event is described in different passages, the details would all agree. However, there are many parallel accounts in the Qur’an which “differ in detail,

⁴⁶ Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) in Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 256-259. The latter contains eighty-four such examples from Hemer.

⁴⁷ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Rev. and expanded. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 474.

order, and content.”⁴⁸ Some examples of conflicting problem passages are: (1) what the people said to Lot (7:82; 26:167; 27:56; 29:29); (2) the way God punished Sodom (7:84; 26:173; 27:28; 29:31); (3) what God said to the angels at Adam’s creation (7:11; 38:71-72); (4) what Satan (Iblis) said when he refused to prostrate to Adam (7:12; 38:76); (5) how God responded to Satan (7:13; 38:77); (6) what Satan threatened to do to God’s followers (7:16-17; 38:82-83); and (7) how God responded to this threat (7:18; 38:84-85).⁴⁹

The first example is enough to show the challenge facing Muslims. There are four places in the Qur’an where Allah is said to quote Lot’s encounter with the homosexual rapists at Sodom, and each one is different:

Will you commit foulness such as no creature ever did before you? For you come with lust to men instead of women; you are indeed a transgressing people! (7:80)

What! Of all creatures do you come unto the males? And leave the wives your Lord created for you? No, but you are people who transgress. (26:165-166)

Will you commit abomination knowingly? Must you practice lust with men instead of women? No, you are but a people that are ignorant. (27:54)

You commit obscenity such as no creature did before you. Do you come unto men, and rob on the highway, and practice wickedness in your meetings? (29:28-29)

If the entire Qur’an were dictated to Muhammad, and Muhammad were merely a passive instrument, “why would Allah recite Lot’s words in different ways?”⁵⁰

Problem 6. Wrong Prophecies Ascribed to Muhammad

The Qur’an says Muhammad was prophesied in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. One passage that claims this is Surah 7:157, “Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find described in their Torah and Gospel...” The puzzling question is, where is Muhammed described in the Torah and Gospel? Most Muslim apologists point to Deut. 18:15-

⁴⁸ White, Kindle loc. 2895.

⁴⁹ Covered in detail in chapter ten of White’s *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an*.

⁵⁰ White, Kindle loc. 2920.

19: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” But Acts 3:22-24 applies this to Jesus, not Muhammad. Other Muslims point to the promise of the Advocate or Helper in John 14-16. But that is referring to the Holy Spirit (a second problem is that applying this to Muhammad would make Muhammad divine). Some claim that the name Muhammad appears in the Hebrew Bible in Song of Solomon 5:16: “His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” Muslims have written entire books showing how they “have ‘found’ Muhammad throughout the Bible...”⁵¹ However, attempts to associate Muhammad with these passages would fail to satisfy anyone familiar with these texts.

Problem 7. The Argument Whether Qur’an is Eloquent

Some Muslims claim the Qur’an has a unique, eloquent literary style, and that this is evidence of its divine inspiration. It has been argued that no human could arrange and compose a perfect book like the Qur’an, even if they were challenged to do so. But people have found irregularities in the text of the Qur’an. Iranian Shi’ite scholar Ali Dashti said,

The Quran contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully intelligible without the aid of commentaries; foreign words, unfamiliar Arabic words, and words used with other than the normal meaning; adjectives and verbs inflected without observance of the concord of gender and number; illogical and ungrammatically applied pronouns which sometimes have no referent; and predicates which in rhymed passages are often remote from the subjects.⁵²

One popular Scottish writer greatly offended many Muslims when he said, “It is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook, a wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite. Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran.”⁵³

⁵¹ White, Kindle loc. 2750.

⁵² Ali Dashti, *Twenty-Three Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammad* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 48, 49 in Geisler p. 192 Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 192.

⁵³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1841), 64.

Regardless of how eloquent the Qur'an is, eloquence and uniqueness are questionable tests for divine inspiration. Geisler points out that Mozart composed his very first symphony when he was six years old!⁵⁴ Moreover, he finished all his music before the age of thirty-five. In comparison, Muhammad did not even begin until he was forty. If eloquence alone were the test for inspiration, then the works of Mozart—along with Homer and Shakespeare—would be divinely inspired too. But as Geisler said, “Eloquence is highly questionable as a test for divine inspiration. At best it only proves that Muhammad was extremely gifted.”⁵⁵

Problem 8. The Challenge of the ‘Satanic Verses’

According to Samuel Green, there is an event that is well recorded in early Islamic literature which Muslim leaders rarely discuss among their general followers.⁵⁶ The events form the backdrop for what's known today as the ‘Satanic verses’ of the Qur'an. As the story goes, when Muhammad first began preaching, the people in Mecca (who were polytheists) opposed his message of strict monotheism. But then Muhammad did something strange. He seemed to give approval of some local idol-gods named al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat. He said to the locals, “Have you thought of al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third ... these are the exalted Gharaniq (a high flying bird) whose intercession is approved.”⁵⁷ At this, the locals

... were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods and they listened to him ... Then the people dispersed and Quraysh went out, delighted at what had been said about their gods, saying, “Muhammad has spoken of our gods in splendid fashion.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 192.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Samuel Green, “The Satanic Verses and Their Implications,” *Answering Islam*, last modified June 17, 2012, <https://www.answering-islam.org/Green/satanic.htm>.

⁵⁷ Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 165, 166 in Samuel Green, “The Satanic Verses and Their Implications.” Green has a footnote here that says, “Numidian cranes which fly at a great height. They were probably thought to fly near the heavens and thus be able to intercede with god(s).”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

After this happened, Gabriel rebuked Muhammed by saying, “What have you done, Muhammad? You have read to these people something I did not bring you from God and you have said what He did not say to you.”⁵⁹ Muhammad then confessed, “I ascribed to Allah, what He had not said.”⁶⁰ Gabriel then told him to speak *against* the idols. Muhammed then *changed* the recitation of Surah 53 to, “They [the three idol-gods] are naught but names yourselves have named, and your fathers; God has sent down no authority touching them.” (53:23, Arberry)

When Muhammad changed the recitation, the people in Mecca said, “Muhammad has repented of what he said about the position of your gods with Allah, altered it and brought something else.”⁶¹ The Qur’an seems to provide a resolution to this bizarre event by saying, “Never have We sent a single prophet or apostle before you with whose wishes Satan did not tamper. But God abrogates the interjections of Satan and confirms His own revelations.” (22:52) In other words, Satan has been attempting to thwart the message of God’s prophets throughout history.

The ‘Satanic verses’ are challenging to Muslims for obvious reasons. How could Muhammed think he was receiving divine revelation when it was coming from Satan? Is there other text in the Qur’an that originated from Satan?⁶² Does not this call into question the entire Qur’an corpus?⁶³ And what exactly does a *change* in the text of Surah 53 mean? Can previous text really be replaced (abrogation)?⁶⁴ How does all this sit with the concept that today’s Qur’an

⁵⁹ Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 166 in Samuel Green, “The Satanic Verses and Their Implications.”

⁶⁰ Ibn Sa’d, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, vol. 1, 237 in Samuel Green, “The Satanic Verses and Their Implications.” See also *Al-Tabari, The History of Al-Tabari*, vol. 6, 111.

⁶¹ Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 166, 167 in Samuel Green, “The Satanic Verses and Their Implications.”

⁶² Consider this in light of Paul’s statement: “...there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:7-9)

⁶³ Especially considering the fact that Muhammad first encounter in the Hira cave was not pleasant, but the thought he had encountered an evil *jinn*.

⁶⁴ As I show in Appendix 1, I do not mention general abrogation as a problem in this paper. However, this is certainly one instance where it would seem to be a very serious problem for the Qur’an, as it seems to command Muslims to commit the unforgivable sin of *shirk*.

is a perfect copy of a heavenly, uncreated, eternal Qur'an revealed to Muhammad by Gabriel? The easiest thing to do is for Muslims to deny this is authentic. But there does seem to be enough historic evidence to suggest that such an event really happened.⁶⁵ The problem remains of how such an unflattering story would find its way into an authoritative collection of *hadith*.

Problem 9. Lack of Miracle Evidence

Miracles have a very important purpose in the Old and New Testaments. They are supernatural acts meant to confirm truth claims given by genuine prophets of God. It is easy for anybody to make a spiritual truth claim. But only God can perform a genuine miracle. Miracles, when they are accompanied by truth claims, provide evidence that the prophet's message is true. Because of this, God established a pattern of confirming prophetic messages by miracles. This goes all the way back to Moses in the Torah (Ex. 4:1-9). We also see this truth claim / miracle confirmation pattern in the New Testament (cf. Mt. 9:5-7; Jn. 3:2; 5:36; 9:30; 11:47, 48; Heb. 2:4).

Qur'an's lack of miracle evidence. But where is the truth claim / miracle confirmation pattern in the Qur'an? Muslims today provide a long list of Muhammad's miracles: (1) the Quran itself; (2) splitting of the moon; (3) Night Journey; (4) causing Qurashite warriors to go blind; (5) made a horse/rider sink into the earth; (6) supernaturally provided food/water; (7) water again; (8) commanded trees to move; (9) made a well to swell; (10) blinded by dust; (11) made a barren ewe produce milk; (12) spit into somebody's eye and healed; (13) caused rain in a drought; (14) had prayers instantly answered; (15) stones/tree greeted him; (16) could understand animals; (17) comforted a palm tree; (18) did not cast a shadow; (19) stopped an earthquake with his foot; (20) could hear people tortured in graves; (21) could speak to the dead; (22) could heal sick and blind

⁶⁵ Green says, "Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa'd and Al-Tabari all accepted the event as real, and that Bukhari gives a partial account. Therefore there is no historical reason to doubt that the Satanic Verses happened." Samuel Green, "The Satanic Verses and Their Implications." Robert Morey says of the event, "It is a fact of history that is supported by all Middle East scholars, Western and Muslim." Robert A. Morey, *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2003), 85, 86.

by touch; (23) and his presence brought illumination, absence brought darkness.⁶⁶ But the problem is, apart from the first one (the Qur'an itself), none of these miracles are recorded in the Qur'an. They come from outside the Qur'an instead.⁶⁷ This is strange for a book that claims to be the final revelation for all time.

The Qur'an as Muhammad's miracle. Muhammad never offered any proof when challenged by unbelievers (Surah 3:183-184; 4:153; 6:8-9). But the Qur'an itself suggests that it is enough of a miracle for the people to believe: "... is it not sufficient for them that We revealed to you the Book which is recited to them?" (29:51) In other words, the Qur'an *itself* is the confirmation. This would be a clear break in the truth claim / miracle confirmation pattern established by God in the Torah and Gospels. In short, "Muslims offer no good explanation for Muhammad's failure to do miracles."⁶⁸ One would think that a perfect book, especially one that claims to be the pinnacle of God's revelation, would provide *as much or more* confirmation than prior revelation.

Problem 10. Strong Evidence for Christ's Resurrection

The Qur'an agrees with the New Testament in some areas—for example, Jesus was miraculously born to a virgin named Mary (19:20-21), was strengthened by the Holy Spirit (2:136; 5:110), was righteous (3:46; 6:85), was taught by God (5:110), was appointed a prophet (2:136; 3:84; 19:30; 33:7) and is now in paradise (3:55). But there are big areas of disagreement. One of the biggest is over the resurrection of Christ. The Qur'an rejects Christ's resurrection, saying that he was not crucified but taken directly into heaven instead.⁶⁹ It reads,

⁶⁶ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Miracles of Muhammad," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracles_of_Muhammad.

⁶⁷ They come from the *hadith*. It would seem to be a big problem to claim the *hadith* are reliable when it comes to the miracles of Muhammad, but not reliable when it comes to the 'Satanic verses' (see previous point). Moreover, Geisler notes that the miracle stories of Muhammed are rejected by most Muslim scholars. See Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 169.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁹ It follows that Muslims reject the biblical account that Jesus died as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Other points of disagreement would be that the Qur'an says Jesus is not God's son (i.e., not divine, 4:171; 5:17, 72) and merely puts Jesus on the same level as the other prophets (4:163; 5:75).

That they said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”;—but *they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them*, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. (4:157, emphasis mine)

These are mutually exclusive claims. If it can be proven that the New Testament account of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection were true, then the Qur’an’s account of Jesus would be false.

Resurrection central to early Christians. The overwhelming testimony from the early followers of Christ is that the following events happened: Jesus lived, was crucified, died, was buried, his tomb became empty, and he was seen alive by witnesses. That Jesus died, was buried and rose again are not ancillary to the message of the early church but are *central points* in the Gospels.

Jesus died. That Jesus really died is evidenced by (1) Jesus having no sleep the night before (e.g., praying in Garden, taken, trials throughout night into morning; Mt. 26:36-27:1); (2) being beaten and forced to carry his cross (Jn. 19:17) until it was no longer possible to stand up (Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21; Lk. 23:26); (3) undergoing crucifixion (Mt. 27:38; Mk 15:24, 27; Lk 23:32, 33) which is death by suffocation; (4) undergoing blood loss from the nail in hands and feet (Jn. 20:25-27), crown of thorns beaten into his head (Mt. 27:29; Jn. 19:2), and the cat o’ nine tails whip (Mk. 15:15; Jn. 19:1); (5) being killed by professional Roman executioners (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 23:47) who (6) stabbed Jesus in the side with a spear and blood flowed out to confirm his death (John 19:34); (7) Pilate double-checking to make sure was dead (Mk. 15:44-45); (8) Jesus’ entire body being wrapped in seventy-five pounds of cloth (Jn. 19:40) and (9) placed in a sealed tomb (Matt. 27:60; Jn. 19:39-40).

Jesus’ tomb became empty. His tomb becoming empty is evidenced by all four gospels (Mt. 28:1-8; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-10; Jn. 20:1-10). There was even supernatural confirmation from an angel who said, “He is not here, for he has risen” (Mt. 28:6).

Many post-death encounters with Jesus. There were at least twelve post-death encounters with Jesus recorded in the Gospels. These include the women at his tomb, Peter and John, the

remaining eleven disciples (more than once), James (Jesus' half-brother), over five-hundred people at once, and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:1-9). These people interacted with him—they saw him, heard him, touched him, talked to him, ate with him, and saw him work more miracles. He reportedly did all of this in a physical body with 'flesh and bones' (Lk. 24:39; Acts 2:31; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7) that still showed his physical wounds (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27).

Evidence from history. There are additional statements outside the New Testament that corroborate the events described within the Gospels. Josephus, writing in AD 94, said,

There was at this time a wise man who was called *Jesus*. . . *Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die*. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that *he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive*.⁷⁰

Cornelius Tacitus, writing in AD 100, said,

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, *suffered the extreme penalty* during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most *mischievous superstition*... broke out not only in *Judea*, the first source of the evil, but even in *Rome*...⁷¹

Lucian, writing in AD 170, said,

The *Christians*, you know, *worship a man* to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... [They] deny the gods of Greece, and *worship the crucified sage*, and live after his laws.⁷²

Evidence from the Torah. Furthermore, the Old Testament predicted Messiah would die. Isaiah 53:10 says, “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him [Messiah]...” Daniel 9:26 says, the “anointed one shall be cut off.” The Old Testament also predicted that Messiah would live forever. Isaiah 9:6, 7 says, “For to us a child is born... of the increase of his government and of

⁷⁰ Arabic version of Flavius Josephus, *Testimonium*, 18:3:3 is given here since most scholars consider the Greek version authentic but edited by later Christians. The Arabic is more neutral and likely closer to the original according to Mark Strauss. See Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 39-40.

⁷¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15:44, emphasis mine in Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 202–203. Of course, Tacitus, an unbeliever, would refer to belief of the resurrection as superstition here.

⁷² *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, emphasis mine, in Geisler and Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, 203.

peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom... from this time forth and forevermore.” It also says, “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see [physical] corruption.” (Ps. 16:10) The only way for somebody to both physically die and physically live forever is resurrection. Christians believe that Jesus claimed to be the promised Old Testament Messiah. Therefore, they hold it was necessary for him to both die and be resurrected in order to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures.

Common objections by Muslims. One Muslim theory is that somebody else died in Jesus’ place (Judas or Simon). In one version, God put the shape of Jesus onto Judas, and they crucified Judas instead. In another, the Roman soldiers took the wrong person because it was dark. There are a number of reasons Christians reject these substitution theories. Some reasons include: (1) these substitution legends are not credible and are contrary to written eyewitness testimony of the Gospels; (2) they are contrary to extra-biblical evidence above that Jesus was crucified (e.g., Josephus, Tacitus and Lucian); (3) they require his closest followers and even family (mother and brothers) to be either completely ignorant or complicit in propagating a lie.

To conclude my final point, there seems to be strong evidence that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ really happened. And if it happened, then the testimony of the Qur’an that Jesus did not die would be in error. And the Qur’an would not be a perfect book.

Conclusion

Muslims today believe the printed Qur’an they have is a perfect copy of the original heavenly Qur’an dictated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel thirteen centuries ago. However, as we have seen in this paper, there are some big challenges facing anybody who holds this view. There are recent discoveries of pre-Uthman textual variants. There is the issue where the Qur’an seems to misrepresent Christian doctrine. It strangely quotes from spurious and legendary material. There are conflicting parallel accounts. It curiously says the Old and New Testaments speak about Muhammad when it does not seem to. The so-called ‘Satanic verses’ call into question the origin of Muhammad’s message. And the Qur’an seems to lack the truth claim / miracle confirmation pattern established by God in the Old and New Testaments for

corroborating prophets. At the same time, a case can be built showing the New Testament documents are reliable, and that there is strong evidence for the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (contrary to statements made by the Qur'an).

Now, for the Qur'an to be *absolutely perfect*, it would need to successfully defend itself against *all ten* of these points. Its imperfectness is proven if it is shown to fail in any one of these areas. In this respect, saying the Qur'an is perfect attempts to prove too much. It is reasonable to concede at least one point in this paper is tenable. In doing so, one also makes the concession that the Qur'an is an imperfect book.

Appendix 1. Why Abrogation Is Not Mentioned as a Problem in this Paper

Muslims generally hold to the doctrine of abrogation, which means God can replace or supersede prior commands. The doctrine finds support from the Qur'an itself. It says, "God abrogates or confirms whatsoever He will..." (13:39, Ahmed Ali) It also says, "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it." (2:106) The Qur'an suggests Muhammad's opponents had a problem with abrogation when it says, "And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse... they say, 'You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies].'" (16:101) The Qur'an then seems to reassure Muslims that God indeed has the ability to change any command he sends down: "Allah is most knowing of what He sends down... But most of them do not know." (16:101)

Table 4. Examples of abrogation in the Qur'an

Topic	Abrogated	Abrogator
Treatment of Christians/Jews	Have patience, be peaceful with them (2:109; 5:13; 8:61; 29:46; 42:15).	Fight and subject them to forced taxation (9:5, 29).
Worship direction	Any direction (2:115).	Only towards Mecca (2:144).
Wine	Wine permitted (2:219).	Completely forbidden (5:90).
Handling property at death	By last will and testament (2:180).	Follows rules of inheritance ⁷³ (4:7; 4:11).
No. of enemies in war to die	Ten times (8:65).	Two times (8:66).

Number of abrogated verses. Muslims typically believe anywhere from a handful to hundreds of verses have been abrogated.⁷⁴ Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (AD 671-741) mentions forty-two

⁷³ David S. Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," *Arabica* 29, no. 3 (Sep., 1982): 246-95, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4056186?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁷⁴ See *Wikipedia*, s.v. "List of Abrogations in the Qur'an," https://wikiislam.net/wiki/List_of_Abrogations_in_the_Qur%27an. Some Muslims believe there are no abrogations. David Bukay points out those who reject abrogation fall outside the mainstream. Bukay, "Peace or Jihad? Abrogation in Islam," *Middle East Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2007), <https://www.meforum.org/1754/peace-or-jihad-abrogation-in-islam>. For an example of a Muslim outside the mainstream who rejects abrogation, see A. Muhammed, "The lie of 'Quranic Abrogation' (The Greatest Lie against the Quran)," True Islam, accessed May 16, 2019, [http://www.quran-islam.org/main_topics/quran/false_accusations/abrogation_claims_\(P1216\).html](http://www.quran-islam.org/main_topics/quran/false_accusations/abrogation_claims_(P1216).html).

while Hammad ibn Salamah (AD 783) mentions as many as two-hundred and thirty-eight.⁷⁵ More recently, Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) reduced it down to five.⁷⁶ Wikiislam.net contains a helpful side-by-side comparison of all suggested verses. Table 4 contains some examples.

Why not included in this paper. Before Christians start accusing the Muslim God of making contradictory statements here, they should be aware that some (but not all) Christians see abrogation within the Bible. Some see abrogation of Mosaic laws throughout different time periods in the Old Testament.⁷⁷ For example, Elijah built an altar and offered a sacrifice outside the sanctuary even though this was forbidden earlier (1 Ki. 18:31, Dt. 12:13). The Talmud says Ezra ordered that tithes should go to the priests, but Num. 18:21 said it should go to the Levites (Yeb. 86b, Hul. 131b). Some Christians see Jesus' statement about divorce and remarriage (Mt. 7:28, 29), as well as his indirect declaration that all foods were clean (Mk. 7:15, 19), as an abrogation of Mosaic law.⁷⁸ On a larger scale, many speak of the entire legal system being abrogated (Heb. 8:13).⁷⁹ Muslims are quick to show examples like this above.⁸⁰ For these reasons, I have not included abrogation as one of the ten problems in this paper.

⁷⁵ David Powers, "The Exergetical Genre nasikh al-Qur'an," 122-126 in Rippen, A., ed., "Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 12 Volumes* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1906), 131.

⁷⁸ Douglass J. Moo, Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., "Law," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 456.

⁷⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1938), 218. One difference, however, is that Christians believe Jesus Christ fulfilled the Mosaic law. Christians are now under the New Covenant and are not obligated to observe the Old. Its fulfillment is the basis for it being replaced with something better.

⁸⁰ For examples, see "Thoughts On Abrogation? Think About It!," Islamic Awareness, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/abrogate.html>.

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