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Has the Bible Been Corrupted as Some Muslims Claim?

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I have Muslims to thank for my being an evangelist! In the 1990s, I was a youth worker and hadn't thought much about Islam nor had I ever tried to share my faith with a Muslim. Then one day a friend invited me to try street evangelism at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park, and I quickly got drawn into lively conversations (and debates!) with the many Muslims there. They asked dozens of questions and forced me to think about my faith intellectually for the first time.

Among those questions was one I still hear frequently today from Muslims: "Hasn't the Bible been corrupted?" (The subtext being that the Bible is *unreliable*, the Qur'an is *perfect*, so why would one bother reading the former?)

As a Christian, there's lots one might say about this claim, especially if you've studied any apologetics. For example, you could tell your Muslim friends about the thousands of early biblical manuscripts, many predating the Qur'an by centuries. Or about the powerful evidence that much of the Bible, especially the Gospels, is based on eyewitness testimony. Or one could talk about the ways that archaeology has verified and confirmed many biblical stories, especially in the New Testament.

You might also turn the tables, asking your Muslim friends if they're aware of the many problems with the Qur'an and *its* textual history. For example, according to Muslim sources, sometime around AD 650, the third ruler of the Islamic empire, Uthman, was so concerned about differences in Qur'an manuscripts, he had an official copy of the Qur'an made and then:

Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. (Sahih Bukhari 6.61.510)

I remember once mentioning this destruction of variant Qur'an manuscripts in a lecture at the University of Alberta in Canada. Afterward, two Muslim medical students accosted me, implying I had invented the story. I asked them to pull out their phones, then I directed them to a Muslim website where they could read the account in the Muslim sources for themselves. They looked visibly shaken as they realized the implications.

So here's an alternative approach to the "Bible has been corrupted" claim. You could begin by pointing out that the Qur'an is very positive about the Bible; for example:

He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel. (Q. 3:3)

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Muhammad is also told to ask the Jews and Christians if he has any questions:

But if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, ask those who read the Book before you. (Q. 10:94)

Furthermore, whenever the Qur'an even mentions the Torah (the Old Testament) or the Gospel (Arabic: *Injil*, the New Testament), it is positive. For example:

And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a guidance and an admonition unto the god-fearing. (Q. 5:46)

Turning outside the Qur'an to the Muslim traditions found in the Hadith, we read of Muhammad speaking very favorably about the Bible. For example, on one occasion, a Jewish couple, caught in adultery, were brought to Muhammad for judgment. He asked for a copy of the Torah, and then:

Muhammad withdrew the cushion from beneath him and placed the Torah on it saying: I believed in thee and in Him Who revealed thee. (Sunan Abi Dawud 4449; Book 40, Hadith 99)

If the Qur'an and Muhammad are overwhelmingly positive about the Bible, where did this claim of corruption arise from? It actually first arose centuries after Muhammad's death because of a theological problem. Muhammad had claimed his message was identical to that of the Bible.

But in seventh-century Arabia, where Muhammad preached, the Bible had not been translated and circulated in Arabic, so nobody could check. Once Islam began expanding after Muhammad's death in AD 632, with Muslim armies conquering large swathes of territory, formally Christian countries fell to the expanding Islamic empire. Muslim scholars were able to study the Bible and discovered a problem: it did *not* say the same as the Qur'an. So either Muhammad was wrong (which was unthinkable!) or another answer was needed: so Muslim scholars invented the claim of biblical corruption to solve their theological dilemma.

But that Islamic "solution" created a massive, deeper problem. If your Muslim friends say the Bible has been corrupted, you can ask them if the Scriptures that came before Muhammad were corrupted because Allah was powerless to protect them or because Allah simply couldn't be bothered to protect them? Is Allah *weak* or is Allah *compassionless*?

That question forces your Muslim friends to grapple with what their claim says about God.¹ And then you might add: "What about, instead of insulting and attacking each other's scriptures, why don't we *talk about them*? Why don't you share with me your favorite Qur'an verse—and tell me what it means to you—and I'll share my favorite Bible passage?" Then take the opportunity to introduce your Muslim friends to one of the stories of Jesus: for, after all, as Christians, the reason we love the Bible is that it's the Word of God in print, designed to introduce us to the Word of God made flesh.

¹ I sometimes will mention Q. 5:10, which says "And they who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, such are rightful owners of hell." I'll say: "My friend, the way you're talking about the Scriptures make it very much sound as if you're denying or attacking God's revelation: be careful! You're playing with hellfire."

For further study consider these books: *Why Trust the Bible?* By Amy Orr Ewing | *Can We Trust the Gospels?* By Peter Williams | *Unearthing the Bible* by Titus Kennedy | *Corrections in Early Qur'an Manuscripts: Twenty Examples* by Daniel A. Brubaker