Overcoming Muslim Misunderstandings that the Bible has been corrupted

Quotations from the Quran are in modern English from a translation by Thomas Cleary an Islamic scholar with a PhD from Harvard University.

The Early Days of Islam

It is clear from a study of the Quran that both Jews and Christians are accepted as keepers and custodians of Al-Kitab – the Holy Scriptures of the People of the Book (both the Torah – the Old Testament and the Injil – the New Testament).

Sura 5:44, "*We revealed the Torah, in it is guidance and light; the prophets who surrendered to God judge the Jews thereby, as to the Rabbis and the learned, by what was entrusted to them of the Book of God, of which they were witnesses. So do not fear people, but fear me and do not sell my signs for a petty price. And any who do not judge by what God has revealed are the ones who are atheists."*

Sura 3:3, *"God revealed the Book* (Al-Kitab) *to you in truth, verifying what was before it; God revealed the Torah and the Injil before as guidance for humanity and God revealed the criterion."*

The author of the Torah was God. See Sura 7:145, *"And we wrote of all things for him in the tablets, counsel and judgement on all things: hold to them strongly and direct your people to take what is best in them. We will show you the abode of those who deviate."* Also see Deut. 9:10, ***"When I*** (Moses) ***went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord had made with you …. The Lord gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the Day of Assembly."***

The Quran says that God Himself has taken care of the Torah and other revelations and taught them to (the Lord) Jesus. Sura 3:48, *"And God will teach him (the Lord Jesus) Scripture and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel…."* See also Sura 5:110, *"Then God will say, 'Jesus, Son of Mary, remember my favour to you and your mother when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit. You spoke to people in the cradle and in maturity and when I taught you Scripture and wisdom – the Torah and the Injil … and you healed the blind and the leprous by my permission and you raised the dead by my permission...."*

Ibn Abbas, one of the best commentators on the Quran wrote, "Jesus learned it while he was in his mother's womb. The Prophet Yahyah (John the Baptist) also confirmed him." See Sura 3:39, *"Then the angels called him while he was standing there praying in the room saying, 'God gives you glad tidings of John, verifying a word from God, noble, chaste; a prophet, one of the righteous'."*

At-Tabari and other early commentators on the Quran said that Jesus became a master of the Torah and confirmed it and acted according to what is written in the Torah. Again according to At-Tabari there were four experts of the Old Testament in the history of Israel – Moses, Joshua, Ezra and Jesus. Ar-Razi said, "Moses said to collect 70 people and Joshua for this purpose. Ezra had also translated the Torah and there was no difference between it and the original. Ar-Razi also said, "Scholars had concealed copies (of the Torah) in the caves of mountains." This was many centuries before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. And at the time of their discovery, when they were compared to other copies, they saw no difference between them.

The Al-Kitab of the People of the Book is spoken of in the Quran in terms of high praise and is sometimes described as "the Book of God" and as "the Word of God". (Sura 2:75, 101) *"Do you hope that they will believe you, when a faction of them hear the Word of God and then knowingly pervert it after understanding it?"* (Sura 2:101) *"And when a messenger from God came to them, confirming what was with them, a faction of those to whom the book was given threw the Book of God behind them as if they did not know it!"*

The final judgement in deciding these matters is given in a number of Quranic verses:

3:184, *"Then if they repudiate you, so have prophets been repudiated before you, who brought testimonies and Scriptures and the enlightening book* (Al-Kitab)."

5:44-47, *"And in it we prescribed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth and injuries in retaliation. But if anyone forgives it for charity, that is expiation for him. And any who do not judge by what God has revealed, they are the ones who are being unjust. And we caused Jesus, the Son of Mary, to follow in their tracks, verifying what was before him in the Torah and we give him the Injil* (Gospel – the whole New Testament) *with guidance and truth in it, also verifying what was there before him in the Torah and guidance and counsel for the conscientious. And let the people of the Injil judge by what God has revealed in it. Any who do not judge by what God has revealed are the ones who are going astray."*

We find this affirmed in Sura 6:91, *"They do not assess the capacity of God truly when they say God has not revealed anything to a human being. Say, 'Who revealed the book brought by Moses as light and guidance for humanity which you make into paper and show while concealing much. So you were taught what you did not know, neither you nor your ancestors?' Say, 'God', then leave them to play at their vain discussions"*.

Also note Sura 6:154, *"We gave Moses Scripture, moreover, for the fulfilment of those who do good, explaining everything distinctly, as guidance and mercy, that they may believe in the meeting with the Lord."* See Sura 2:136. It is obligatory for all Muslims to say, *"Say, O Muhammad that we believe in what was revealed to Abraham, Moses and Jesus from their Lord."*

Muhammad, during his stay in Mecca and also in his early period in Medina, had a strong leaning towards the People of the Book and a sympathetic attitude to them and their Scriptures – the Torah and the Injil. Al-Buhari and Al-Muslim relate, "The apostle of God came to Medina and found a Jew fasting on the day of Ashura. So he asked, 'What is this day that you are observing by a fast?' The Jew replied, 'This is a great day in which God saved Moses and his people from Pharaoh. Moses fasted on this day out of gratitude and so we have fasted on this that day ever since.' So Muhammad began to fast on that day and ordered Muslims to fast on that day as well."

So the Quran directs Muslims to seek information from the Jews and the Christians and from their books – the Old and New Testaments. Sura 10:94 says, *"So if you have been in doubt about what we revealed to you, then ask those who have already been reading Scripture before you. Truth has come to you from your Lord, so do not be a doubter"*.

Razi and Ibn-Al Kazir relate that there was at least a tribe in Arabia that remain steadfast to the Scriptures after the coming of the Lord Jesus. Al-Tabari says this is why they were called, 'the People of the Book' as they remained steadfast to both the Old and New Testaments.

The majority of the commentators are agreed about the best qualified in their knowledge of God's revelation. Sura 10:94, *"So if you have been in doubt about what we revealed to you, then ask those who have already been reading Scripture before you. Truth has come to you from your Lord so don't be a doubter."*

Read Sura 16:43-44, *"We never sent before you any but men whom we inspired. So ask the people with the reminder if you do not know – with clarifications and Scriptures."*

It is said by Tabari that Muhammad entered the Jewish school and asked questions and got information from them. Razi says that these people used to read and teach the Torah and that they were following it. Muslim Abu Daud's commentary on Sura 2:42 says, "And do not cover truth with falsehood and do not conceal truth knowingly". It is said that the People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and translated it into Arabic. This shows that the Bible was not lost, but was in much use in Muhammad's day. Sura 5:66 says, *"And if they had lived up to the Torah and the Injil and everything revealed to them from their Lord, they would have partaken of enjoyment from above and below. There is a well-balanced community of moderates among them, but what the majority of them are doing is evil."*

It is said by Quranic commentators that the Prophet said, "Do they not have it in their hands, but they do not follow." Surely this is very true of "the Christian World"! It is also related that God taught Jesus the Torah and the Injil in such a way that he knew it by heart.

The Emergence of the Dispute

The days passed peacefully in Medina (Al Medina = the city). But often during conversations, differences of opinion were expressed and disputes arose between the resident Jewish population and the newcomers from Mecca. Bitter disputes arose, first mildly and later in a serious form. At this point Muhammad was advised in the Quran, *"Do not dispute with the People of the Book unless with what is better, except those who have been and just; say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you, for our Lord and your God is one to whom we acquiesce'."*

The Reasons for the Embittered Relationship

It made the Jews of Medina much more hostile to Muhammad when they heard him calling Jesus the Messiah, whom the Jews had already rejected. See the following Suras:

3:45, *"The angel said, 'O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from God, named the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, honoured in the world and the hereafter and one of the intimates of God."*

4:157-158, *"And on account of their saying, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary, messenger of God'; whereas they did not kill him, they did not crucify him, although it was made to seem thus to them. As for those who differ on this, they are certainly in doubt about it; they have no knowledge about it, only following conjecture; but they surely did not kill him, rather God raised him up to the divine presence and God is Almighty, most wise."*

4:171, *"People of the Scripture, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger, a word from God, which God sent down to Mary, spirit from God. So believe in God and God's messengers and do not speak of a Trinity. It is best for you to refrain. God is only one sole divinity too transcendent to have a son, in possession of all in the heavens and on earth and God is a good enough patron."*

The Quran rejects those who reject the Injil – the Gospel/New Testament. See Sura 4:150, *"Those who repudiate God and God's messengers and want to separate God and God's messengers and say, 'We believe in some but reject others' and wish to take a path in between. They are really unbelievers and we have a humiliating penalty in store for unbelievers."*

The relationship grew more and more embittered. This can be seen from the majority of complaints and condemnations the Quran levies against the Jews at this time in Medina. The Jews had begun to tease and mock Muhammad and as a result, the relationship was more and more difficult. The Quran notes the bitter feelings on both sides. See Sura 5:32, *"Of all men, O Muhammad, you will certainly find the Jews as the most intense in their hatred of Muslims."*

Muhammad proclaimed the prediction of the Advent the Old Testament contained – Sura 7:157, *"… Those who follow the messengers, the unlettered Prophet of whom they find written in their sources, in the Torah and the Injil; he directs them to what is just and forbids them from evil. And he permits them wholesome things and forbids them filthy things. He removes their burden from them and the yokes that were on them. So those who believe in Him and honour him and help him and follow the light sent down with him, they are the ones who succeed."*

The Jews of Medina and Kaaba rejected this claim and completely denied it. In reacting to this attitude, we read in Sura 2:101, *"When there came to the Jews apostles of God, affirming this revelation, some of those to whom the Scriptures were given threw the Book of God behind their backs as if they knew it not."*

At that point of time, when the Jews were confronted by Muhammad or by other Muslims, they concealed the divine teachings and sometimes they replied with false or half-truths. The Jews rejected Muhammad's prophethood and rejected the Quran's divine character.

As a result, severe opposition started. Abu Daud relates, "The Prophet directed the Muslims in Medina to oppose what they do". Bukhari (died 870) was a major collector of six works of Hadith – the Sahih al-Bukhari. He said, "The People of the Book (the Old Testament) used to read the Torah in Hebrew explaining it in Arabic to the people of Islam. The apostle (Muhammad) said, "*Do not tell*

that the People of the Book are telling truth and do not accuse them of falsehood, but only say, we believe in God and what has been sent down to us and that which Moses and Jesus received from their Lord." (Sura 2:136)

The "Apostle of God" ordered Zaid to learn Syriac to learn the correspondence of the Jews. He said, "I put no reliance in the Jews."

These few instances show that all the information given by the Jews in Medina was put under suspicion on the grounds that they were not reporting accurately what the Old Testament (the Torah) said. Their interpretations were not accepted because they hid the truth. Sura 2:140, *"Or do you say that Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say, do you know better or does God? And who is more wrong than those who conceal the testimony they have from God. God is not heedless of what you do!"*

The Jews were charged with concealing part of the Torah. Sura 2:174, *"As for those who conceal what God has revealed in Scripture and have exchanged it for a trifle, they will consume nothing but fire and God will not talk to them on the day of resurrection and will not purify them and they will have a painful punishment."* Sura 3:70-71 says much the same, *"O people of Scripture why do you scoff at the signs of God, even as you witness, O people of Scripture, why do you clothe truth with falsehood and knowingly hide the truth?"*

Ibn Abbas is reported to have said, "Do not ask the People of the Book because they were in the habit of passing it off as something else – traditions conflicting with the Book."

Muhammad now began to believe that the Jews, and perhaps some Christians, had no knowledge of their own religion so that even their Injil was not reliable. Why? Because the earlier revelations are not the same as what is written in the Quran. Muhammad believed that the substance of the Kitab is fully repeated in the Quran. He believed that the Lord Jesus took the Injil (the New Testament) up into heaven with him when he was lifted up. This speculation seems baseless because the Quran says concerning the Old Testament in Sura 7:159, *"Among the people of Moses is a community that guides by truth and does justice thereby."* In Sura 7:170 we read, *"As for those who hold fast to the Scriptures and practice prayer, we (God) will never diminish the reward of the righteous."*

See Sura 5:66, *"If they had lived up to the Torah and the Injil and everything revealed to them from their Lord, they would have partaken of enjoyment from above and below. There is a well-balanced community of moderates among them, but what the majority of them are doing is evil."*

See also Sura 5:43*, "And why do they take you for a judge, when they have the Torah in which there is the judgement of God? Yet they still turn away after that. They are not believers."*

The Quran always speaks of the Torah and the Injil with respect which leaves the definite impression that Muhammad, at any rate, believed in the divine origin and the genuineness of both the Torah and the Injil – i.e. the whole Bible. Muhammad himself is told to declare his unqualified faith in the Torah and Injil and he was told by God to follow all the prophets for guidance – Sura 6:91, *"They do not assess the capacity of God truly when they say God has not revealed anything to a human being. Say, 'Who revealed the book brought by Moses as light and guidance for humanity which you make into paper and show while concealing much. So you were taught what you did not know, neither you nor your ancestors'. Say, 'God' then leave them to play at their vain discussions."*

It is very clear from the Quran that the Kitab (the Bible) is indeed the Word of God and the Book of God. Al-Kitab contains the Torah, the Zabbur (the Psalms) and the Injil as well as the revelations of the prophets in the Old Testament. Concerning the Jews of Medina we read in Sura 2:101, *"And when a messenger from God came to them confirming what was with them, a faction of those to whom the Book was given threw the Book of God behind them as if they did not know."*

The Idea of Corruption of the Torah and the Injil

The concept of the corruption of Al-Kitab may be possible, but in reality it is not. Why? Because in Deut. 4:2 we read, ***"Do not add to what I have commanded you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you."*** Also in Rev. 22:19 we read, ***"And if***

anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book". In Jn. 5:39-40 the Lord Jesus said, ***"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."*** So any omission or addition to the teachings of the Lord Jesus is a matter of punishment and destruction.

Let us consider some of the possibilities. A believer in the Kitab cannot do such things and he would not let any unbeliever do so. A Christian will protest against a Jew who wishes to change the Torah if any omission is or additions were to be made either before the Lord Jesus or during his life on earth, for the Lord Jesus clearly affirmed the integrity of the Old Testament. What about after the ascension of the Lord Jesus? There has been an immense amount of archaeological and documentary evidence that the New Testament is a true, accurate record of actual events.

Did the corruption occur while Islam was being preached in Arabia? If so, why does the Quran affirm the truth of the Torah and the Injil if it was known that it was a corrupted text? Did this corruption occur a couple of hundred years after the beginning of Islam? This is also both impossible and impracticable due to the fame of the Quran and its widespread distribution.

The Charges of Corruption

These were never levelled against Christians, but only against the Jews of Medina – i.e. not against all Jews. The main charges are:

- They teach, but they do not do what they teach.
- They believe parts of the Scripture and reject other parts, such as the Injil, so some parts of the Scripture have effectively been thrown away.
- They ascribe to God what has been written with their own hands.
- They have changed the **meaning** of the text.

It is important to note that the changing of the words and verses – i.e. the text of Al-Kitab – is never ascribed to them. There is a fairly long passage in Sura 6:82 that says, *"Those who believe and do not dress their belief with injustice, they are the ones for whom there is security, as they are the ones who are guided. And that was the argument on our behalf. We gave to Abraham versus his people. We raise by degrees whomever we will. For your Lord is most judicious, most intelligent. And we gave him Isaac and Jacob. We guided them all. And we guided Noah before that and from his descendants David and Solomon and Jacob and Joseph and Mary and Aaron. Thus do we recompense those who are good and Zacharias and John and Jesus and Elias. Each of them had integrity. And Ishmael and Elisha, Jonah and Lot, each of them we blessed over all people and their ancestors and descendants and brethren. We chose them and guided them to a straight path. That is God's guidance by which God guides whichever of God servants God wills. And if they associated anything with God, whatever they did would be fruitless for them. Those are the ones to whom we gave Scripture and law and prophethood. But if they reject them, then we will entrust them to people that do not reject them. They are the ones whom God guided, so emulate their guidance. Say, 'I do not ask you any reward for this; for it is nothing but a reminder for all peoples.' "*

Note that the changing of words and verses is never ascribed to them. It relates to 17 prophets who were righteous, divinely guided and who everyone, including Muhammad, must follow. Note that the Scriptures of the People of the Book were already held in great esteem and were never counted as unreliable.

The Existence of Al-Kitab and its availability as the real and authentic text of the Torah and the Injil

These are pointed out in the Quran as well as in the traditions and commentaries. For example, one of the Companions of Muhammad said, "I used to go to the Jewish schools and it surprised me to see how the Torah confirms the Quran and on the part of the Quran how it confirms the Torah." (Taberi Ibn Kather). Also, Sura 2:97 says, *"Say, whoever is hostile to Gabriel, who revealed this to your heart*

by God's leave, ***confirming*** *what preceded it* (the Torah and the Injil) *as guidance and good news for believers."*

The person who does not believe in Al-Kitab is an infidel. Sura 10:94 says, *"So if you have been in doubt about what we revealed to you, then ask those who have already been reading Scripture before you. Truth has come to you from the Lord so do not be a doubter."* Sura 2:121 says, *"Those to whom we have given the book* (Al-Kitab) *read it as it really is to be read; they believe in it and if any repudiate it, then they are the losers."*

Both Jews and Christians have inherited the Scriptures. See Sura 7:169, *"Then a later generation succeeded them, who inherited Scripture while grasping the temporal advantage of this moment and saying, 'We will be forgiven' and would grasp a similar advantage if it came to them. Was not the covenant of Scripture taken from them that they would not say anything about God but the truth. And they studied what was in it."* Sura 7:170 says, *"As for those who hold fast to Scripture and practice prayer, we will never diminish the reward of the righteous."*

We see in Sura 35:32 that both Jews and Christians study the Scriptures. Muhammad himself not only followed, but also judged according to Al-Kitab together with the Hadith. This belief in Al-Kitab was made part and parcel of the Muslim faith. The Quran confirms its teaching and its contents. See Sura 4:47, *"O you to whom Scripture has been given, believe in what we have sent down verifying what is with you, before we obliterate faces and turn them backwards or curse them as we cursed those who violated the Sabbath."*

We read in Sura 2:41, *"And believe in what I revealed to you, verifying what you have and do not be the first to reject it and do not sell my signs for a petty price and be mindful of me."* Again in Sura 2:91 we read, *"And when they are told, 'Believe in what God has revealed', they say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and disbelieve in anything else, even if it is the truth ……"*

The Jews and the Christians in the time of Muhammad had preserved Al-Kitab on parchments. See Sura 6:91, *"They do not assess the capacity of God truly when they say God has not revealed anything to a human being. Say, 'Who revealed the book brought by Moses as light and guidance for humanity which you make into paper and show while concealing much so you were taught what you did not know neither you nor your ancestors?' Say, 'God' then leave them to play at their vain discussions."*

Examples from the Traditions

Salman the Persian, one of the Companions of Muhammad was called "a man having two books" – the Injil and the Quran. Another example is Omar who brought a copy of the Torah and started to read it. Hadija took Muhammad to Baraka who was a Christian and used to translate the Injil into Arabic. The Sahih al-Bukhari says, "The people of the book (Al- Kitab) used to recite the Torah and interpret it in Arabic." A Jewish slave belonging to Muhammad came to see him and found "his father" reading the Torah. On another occasion Muhammad said, "Are not these Jews and Christians reading the Torah and the Injil, but they observe nothing of what is in them"!

From the reliable traditions, that were collected by Al Bukhari, it becomes clear that the Bible was in Hebrew and in Arabic during the time of Muhammad – usually in parchment form and it was read to Muhammad and to his companions, some of whom were learned Jews who had embraced Islam. None of them ever objected to the Bible's reliability and integrity.

It was only in later ages that some Muslim scholars began to question its authenticity. This was largely due to the growing animosity between Muslims and Jews/Christians.

The Charges of Corruption in the Quran

There are very few of these in the Quran! The words used are "corruption", "changing" and "hiding". Did the peoples of the Holy Book – Al-Kitab – really falsify the text?

The Muslim idea of corruption may be explained in this way:

- The text of the Torah and the Injil have been tampered with by the Jews and the Christians so what we have in our current Bible is not the same as it was in Muhammad's day.

- The original Injil was taken up into heaven and is no longer available. This teaching of Muslims has a far-reaching effect. For a start it means that Muslims can ignore the Christian message.
- One can explain the causes of the differences in the stories found in the Bible and the Quran. The Arabic word for "corruption" means a change due to the transposition of a letter in a word, thereby effecting an alteration. But for ordinary Muslims worldwide it means that the text of the Bible is corrupt.

This charge is levelled in two ways:

i) All references to Muhammad's name were suppressed.

ii) Muhammad's coming, which was foretold, was removed from the text.

So the present Injil is not the original one!

Here are some Quranic texts:

2:75 *"Do you then hope that they will believe in you, when a faction of them hear the word of God and then knowingly prevent it after understanding it?"*

4:46 *"Some of the Jews pervert words away from their proper usage, saying, 'We hear and defy' and 'Listen without hearing' and 'Our dismay', distorting with their tongues and insulting the religion. And if they had said, 'We hear and obey' and 'Please listen' and 'Please give us your attention' that would surely have been better for them and more and more upstanding. But God has cursed them for their scoffing, for they do not believe, except a small minority."*

5:16 *"Light from God has come to you, a clear Book by which God guides those who follow divine will in ways of peace and brings them from darkness into light, by divine leave and guides them in a straight path."*

5:46 *"And we caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their tracks, verifying what was there before him in the Torah and we gave him the Gospel with guidance and truth in it, also verifying what was there before him in the Torah and guidance and counsel for the conscientious."*

A Comment on these Texts

A particular party or group is mentioned not the whole community of Christians and Jews.

"The light from God has come to you, a clear Book" clearly refers to the Quran and is not a reference to the Torah or to the Injil. The Quran is the true text and should be constantly recited, because a particular group may wish to tamper with it and others listening may then begin to repeat what they hear. See Sura 13:34, ***"There is torment for them in the life of the world and the torment of the hereafter is even harder and they have no defender against God."***

So what really happened was a wrong explanation of the Torah and the hiding of truth, what the Jews knew was really being taught in it.

So the Torah was available in scrolls in Hebrew and what the Jews had was only a part. The other part was, in effect, hidden. Muslim commentators have held any alteration of the text to be a corruption. For example, commentators have asked how can chapters and verses have been handed down over the centuries both in the East and in the West.

Sura 4: 46 (above) refers to salutations (greetings). There is a tradition that is related to Ibn Omar that the Prophet said, "When a Jew salutes you, saying, 'Peace be upon you', then you should answer, 'And on you too'. But in Arabic it is possible to mis-pronounce *'Salaam'* (peace) and pronounce it *'assam'*. So the Jews, by this form of greeting (saying *'assam'*) were saying that they wished Muhammad's death! In Sura 5:45 there is a phrase, *"A life for a life and an eye for an eye and a nose for a nose … and a tooth for a tooth and injuries in retaliation …"* So the Jews, by the 'twisting of their tongues', changed the meaning of what they said.

The expression “we hear and obey” seems to have been a Jewish response to the reading of the Torah – like ‘Amen’ which means, ‘we hear and obey’. So Muhammad accuses the Medina Jews of using deceptive modes of expression, recitation and mispronunciation. They read passages that were made to appear as if they were from the Torah, but in fact they never existed. Razi commenting on this said, “A party of the Jews came to Muhammad asking and seeking answers to some questions, to which he usually replied and when they left him they distorted his replies. So a party of the Jews changed the words contained in the Torah from their original places and told Muhammad, “When we hear you say something should be obeyed, we disobey it”.

So Muslims believe that the Jews in Medina didn’t change the actual words of the Torah. What they did was to twist the meaning in spoken Arabic. Razi wrote that they used to go to Muhammad asking him about a matter. He would explain to them so they could grasp it but when they came out from him they corrupted his words.

This implies that it was not the Torah that the Jews corrupted, but Muhammad’s words in answer to their questions which they later falsely reported when they had left him. This was done orally, but never in writing so either the Jews in Medina distorted Muhammad’s response in derision and mockery of him and of the Quran or Muhammad misunderstood what the Jews had said for they were quoting the Torah in Hebrew and so Muhammad could not fully understand.

Comments on “the twisting of the tongue”

Razi explains Sura 3:78, *“And there is a party among them who distort Scripture with their tongues, so that you would consider it to be from Scripture when it is not from Scripture and they say it is from God. It is not from God and they knowingly tell a lie against God.”* Razi says, “How was it possible to insert a corruption into the Torah when it’s celebrity among the Jews was so great?” Commenting on another verse, Sura 2:75: *“Do you then hope that they will believe you when a faction of them hear the word of God and then knowingly pervert it after understanding it?*” Razi says this proves that Muhammad’s prophethood was in doubt among the Jewish listeners in Medina. The Jews said, “This is God’s meaning not what you – i.e. Muhammad – have said.” This is what is meant by “twisting the tongue”.

Razi says, “The Jews, while reading the Torah, ‘twisted their tongues’ and replaced the meaning of stoning (to death) with a lashing. In this connection, Tabari remarks, “Muhammad asked Ben-Suria, the most learned among the Jews, “Why have you Jews changed “the stoning”? The reply was, “Our women are beautiful and to save the lives of our men we cut the command short and instead apply 100 lashes plus shaving their heads.” Muhammad then gave his verdict that they should be stoned.

Again, there is another story about the Jews reading aloud from the Torah. Compare Deut. 22:23-24; ***“If a man happens to meet in a town of virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take them, both of them, to the gate of the town and stone them to death – the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help and the man because he violated another man’s wife.”*** It was different if she was in open country. Then only the man was to be stoned.

So the Jews in Medina substituted “stoning to death” with “a lashing”. It is true that oral conversational texts can be misquoted or wrong interpreted. This may only have been done by the Jews of Medina. Sura 5:46 says, *“And we caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in their tracks, verifying what there was before him of the Torah and we gave him the Gospel with guidance and truth in it also verifying what was there before him in the Torah and guidance and counsel for the conscientious.”*

This also refers to the charge of the corruption of the text – of “twisting of tongues” and listening to lies which has nothing to do with the actual text of Scripture in both the Torah and the Injil.

Note all the charges and complaints made in the Quran and in the traditions were made against the Jews in Medina (in Arabia) and then only against those who were contemporaries of Muhammad. No Christian is charged with such misdeeds!

The Conclusion

We may safely conclude the following facts:

- The Quran nowhere states that the Lord Jesus took the Injil up with Himself into heaven, neither does the Hadith or the Traditions. Al-Kitab (the Bible) was on earth in Muhammad's time. How else could the Quran appeal to it so frequently? The Quran asserts the genuineness and authority of the Injil which was then in circulation among the Arabs and the Jews alike.
- The Quran says it was "sent down" to confirm the previous Scriptures and to safeguard them.
- If Al-Kitab had been corrupted before or after Muhammad's time, God must have known it and if in Muhammad's time, then Muhammad must have known it. In which case he would never have confirmed a corrupted and unreliable book.
- The Quranic verses point out that there were a few impious people in Moses' time who mispronounced words that God had spoken and for this they were punished. But even those people were not charged with corrupting their Holy Book.
- It is twice said that certain youths in Muhammad's time used to shift words from their places. But it should be noted that Christians were never charged with doing this.
- The leading Muslim commentators are of the opinion that sometimes the Jews "twisted" some of the words and commands of the Torah, but they were never charged with changing the actual text of Scripture.
- Most Muslim scholars are of the opinion that Al-Kitab is not corrupt, but that the Jews were suspected of verbally twisting the words of the Torah.
- The text of Al-Kitab – both Torah and Injil – was not changed. This is true of all the early Muslim scholars of the first few centuries after Muhammad. Bukhari said, "There is no man who could corrupt a single word of what has proceeded from God. So the Jews and the Christians could only corrupt it by misrepresenting the meaning of the words of God and not the text itself of the Torah and the Injil.