

The Muslim Theological Perception of the Scriptures of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*

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Abstract

This article highlights the need for Muslims to accurately understand the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians, both as they are depicted in the Holy Qur'an, as well as how they are described in their own individual faith. This study will attempt to depict the Muslim theological understanding of the earlier revealed scriptures based upon the Qur'an and Muslim scholarship in comparison to how Judaism and Christianity view their own currently held. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to demonstrate the main differences that exist between what Muslims perceive and understand as revelation and the earlier scriptures in contrast with the above mentioned faiths own depiction of their scriptures. Moreover, the different views of Muslim theologians on the issue of taḥrīf (distortion) of these scriptures of the previous religious communities will also be discussed in this study.

Keywords: revelation, taḥrīf, sacred scriptures, ahl al-kitāb, tawrāt

Introduction

How Muslims understand the scriptures of *ahl al-kitāb* is important for the sake of understanding contemporary religions such as Judaism and Christianity today, as well as understanding how Muslim scholars in the past have categorised the scriptures of the *ahl al-kitāb*. The basic objective of the present article is to present the main differences that exist between what Muslims perceive and understand as revelation and the earlier scriptures in contrast with the above mentioned faiths' own depiction of their scriptures. In order to develop this understanding this article will first of all present an overall meaning of scripture (*kitāb*) according to Islam. This will be followed by detailed discussion of how the scriptures in Judaism and Christianity is understood by its own adherents, and how that is either similar or different according to the Muslim scholarly opinions and the primary sources of Islam, i.e. Qur'an and hadith. The final section of the discussion will go onto elucidate on how the Muslims scholars understood the terms such as misconstruction (*taḥrīf*), alteration (*tabdīl*) and confusion (*talbīs*) of the originally revealed scriptures to the *ahl al-kitāb*.

Discussion

The classical exegetical scholar Abū Jā'far al-Ṭabarī explained *dīn* (religion) as being the proclamation of the oneness and the uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) of Allah (swt) and the confirmation of what the messengers communicated to the people. Notwithstanding, the situations and contents of the positive commands and the prohibitions set down in such messages have always been varied. The scholar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī further elucidated on the above explanation of Ṭabarī by reasoning that it is the '*aqīda* (creed) that stays the same, and it is the latter, which are the applied laws and the required religious deeds, that change between the different scriptures revealed by Allah (swt).¹ Consequently, each revelation to every prophet and messenger of God through human history is recognised as a form of Islam (Submission to God).² In the Qur'an Allah (swt) said, "And We sent no Messenger before you but We inspired him [saying]: *There is no God save Me, so worship Me.*"³ It is evident that one of the chief unique feature of a Muslim is the fixed

belief that the Qur'an is the literal word of Allah (swt). The Qur'an is recognised as a revelation from Allah (saw) that represents guidance for human beings providing them with laws, norms and principles relating to all aspects of life. For that reason, argues Ghulam Haider Aasi, it is the Islamic teachings that are the most prominent in shaping the Muslims' understanding of the scriptures of the *ahl al-kitāb*.⁴

It is important to note that the term for book or scripture (*kitāb*) in the Qur'an has both a general as well as a specific meaning. In the universal sense it refers to the basis of all the revelations sent by Allah (swt). In fact, the Qur'an and subsequent traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) refers to a Preserved Tablet, "But this is an honoured Qur'an, [Inscribed] in a Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-mahfūz*)"⁵ The term Preserved Tablet appears once in the Qur'an and theologically denotes the sphere where the Qur'an is preserved. It is again mentioned as the Mother of the Book in another Qur'anic verse, "*We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you may understand. Truly, it is the Mother of the Book, in Our Presence, lofty and full of wisdom.*"⁶ In two *aḥādīth* the *lawḥ al-mahfūz* is described as "God created the preserved tablet from a white pearl with a ruby surface; its pen and its writing being of light-upon which all worldly affairs are laid out" and "God sent down all the Qur'an all at once from the *lawḥ al-mahfūz* to the place of glory in the lowest heaven. Then He sent it down on various occasions over thirteen years to the Prophet".⁷

In the particular sense, the term *kitāb* applies to all the individual revelations revealed to the messengers of God throughout human history, as it is stated in the holy book, "This Qur'an is a confirmation of that which was revealed before it, and an explanation of the scripture."⁸ So the question that arises is what are these scriptures that were revealed before the Qur'an? According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Muslims are asked to generally believe in all the scriptures revealed to the messengers throughout human history. In the Qur'an, Allah (swt) states, "*We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.*"⁹ Moreover, in the Qur'an an unidentified scripture is referred to twice as being revealed to Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him), sometimes translated as the Scrolls of Abraham.¹⁰ However, the four scriptures specifically mentioned by name in the Qur'an are the Torah (*Tawrāt*) revealed to Prophet Moses, the Psalms (*Zabūr*) revealed to Prophet David, the Gospel (*Injīl*) revealed to Prophet Jesus and the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad.¹¹ The Qur'an is therefore seen as the final revelation in a similar way as Prophet Muhammad is accepted as the seal of the Messengers. Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an, "*Step by step, He has sent the scripture down to you [Muhammad] with the truth, confirming what went before; He sent down the Torah and the Gospel as a guide for people: He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]*"¹², and "*And it is your Lord that knows best all beings that are in the heavens and on earth: We did bestow on some prophets more (and other) gifts than on others: and We gave to David (the gift of) the Psalms.*"¹³

According to Aasi, three terms give various meaning for religion and religious community in the Qur'anic worldview, i.e. *dīn* signifies the generic meaning of the primordial religion, *milla* is what can be termed a religious tradition or community, and *‘umma* denotes a community, which is based upon a revealed religious and moral norms and at the same time consist of a socio-political entity.¹⁴ In the Qur'an, all the communities who were sent messengers and revelation preceding the *‘umma* of Muhammad are designated as *ahl-al-kitāb*, meaning a people who have been given the divine writ or revelation. Allah (swt) states, "*We revealed the Torah with guidance and*

light, and the prophets, who had submitted to God, the rabbis and scholars all gave judgement by it for the Jews in accordance with that part of the Book that they were entrusted to preserve, and to which they were witness.... We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light and confirmation of the Torah already revealed – a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God.”¹⁵

These scriptures that were revealed before the Qur'an were sent to a particular group of people or nations and were studied by some Muslim scholars in history. It was acknowledged that the only scripture to be universally intended for humanity is the Qur'an. The three scriptures mentioned above were therefore acknowledged to specifically addressing the nation of Israel or as it later was called Judea.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is argued by the majority of Muslim scholars that none of the previous revelations have been preserved in their original form, and Muslims are only obliged to believe in the original form and not the books as they are found today. However, there has been a difference between Muslim theologians on this issue of *tahrīf* (distortion) of scriptures by the previous religious communities. Primarily, one opinion argues that the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament¹⁷ as found today cannot in anyway be identified with the revealed scriptures of *Tawrāt*, *Zabūr* and *Injīl*. This is because the sacred scriptures have been altered in such a way that all that is left are human versions. The second opinion claims that *tahrīf* did not occur within the text of the scriptures but in the interpretation and understanding of the religious communities. Finally, the third opinion is that although *tahrīf* is generally confined to interpretations, there is a unequivocal distortion of text (*tahrīf*) through change, addition and omission.¹⁸ It is the third opinion that is followed by the majority of Muslim scholars. This topic will be revisited later on in the article once the reader has been introduced to these scriptures from the viewpoint of the Jews and the Christians.

It is very important to note at this juncture that in Islam revelation in its original form is believed to originate only from God and cannot be seen as a product of a human society or culture in any sense. The Muslim understanding of scriptures comes from a long tradition of Muslim scholars' comprehension of the topic via the Qur'an and *aḥādīth* and is for that reason considered the 'literal word of God'. For instance, Ibn Taymiyya maintained that the 'words of God' is what the messengers received from God and transmitted, and it cannot be understood as such when it is ensued, however mystically, after the death of a messenger and any such object would naturally be described as a human product. This traditional Muslim theological view concerning the sacred scriptures insist that a revelation must strictly come from God, and any human speech or narrative, however attributed to God, must be rejected. Furthermore, for Muslims, the language of the scripture must be in the language it was revealed whereas any translation is seen to be a human product and not strictly speaking 'the word of God'. Still, what further should be considered is that a sacred scripture does not necessarily mean literally a revealed book or writings in a parchment form, but rather a dictated arranged communication from God that is clearly and evidently distinct from common human speech, but is transmitted through the language of a Messenger of Allah (swt). It could argued that Islam is not resistant to the notion that the revelation may reflect the milieu in which it was revealed, but the leap from the awareness of a scripture that *engages* the society in which it was revealed to the modern impression of social science that it is a *product* of it is strongly rebuffed. So how do Jews and Christians observe their own sacred scriptures today?

The sacred book of the Jews known as the Hebrew Bible¹⁹ by themselves and by Christians today as the Old Testament²⁰ consists of 24 books according to their rabbinical tradition. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections, which are known as the *torah* (five books of Torah), the *nevi'im* (Prophets) and the *ketuvim* (Writings). These three sections are collectively known by the acronym *tanakh*. Today the Orthodox Jews²¹ make a distinction between the revelation of the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Bible. They claim that the first five books were directly revealed and dictated to Moses from God, while the other two sections were indirectly inspired by God to other prophets. Therefore, they claim that the books in the *nevi'im* were inspired through something they call *a gift of prophecy* and the *ketuvim* were inspired under the influence of what they call the *Holy Spirit*²², a lesser degree of inspiration than the *gift of prophecy*.²³

The *Torah* includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The narrative is chronological and traces the *genesis* of the world and humanity and then leads to a focus on Abraham (as) and his descendants through Isaac (as) all the way to the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses (as). All of the Jewish primary laws in the form of divine commandments are to be found in this *Torah*. The second section '*nevi'im*' is commonly translated as prophets or divinely revealed works. It includes the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah²⁴ and Malachi. The third section is called *ketuvim*, which include books such as the Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, Psalms, Job, and Proverbs.²⁵

Most Muslim scholars who have studied the Hebrew Bible throughout history have recognised the distinction between the *Tawrāt* and the rest of the books of the Hebrew Bible; however this has not meant that the other parts of the Hebrew Bible are not accepted by most Muslims. In the Qur'an it is stated, "*We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. Of some messengers, We have already told thee the story; of others We have not; and to Moses God spoke direct.*"²⁶ Therefore, these other books of the Hebrew Bible are recognised as possible revelations to individual prophets and have never been totally discarded by the Muslim scholars. In fact, as early as the 11th century Ibn Ḥazm research consisted of studying the *Torah* (the first five books) and an initial overview of the rest of the 'books' of the Hebrew Bible.²⁷

It seems, however, there are different Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish understanding of the authorship of the Torah today. According to the Orthodox position the five books of Moses (*torah*) were dictated by God to Moses. On the other hand, non-Orthodox Jewish academics and scholars have ardently argued that through research it is evident that there are numbers of different sources in the *torah* that post-date Moses (as). They do not believe in revelation and instead argue that the *torah* was collected and assembled from many different separate documents that were composed and modified by different circles representing diverse religious ideologies in ancient Judaism. It is interesting to note that the scholar Ibn Ḥazm agreed with the latter group and presented as early as the 11th century in his book '*Kitāb al-Fasl*' a very detailed historical criticism of the *Torah* held by the Jews and came to very similar conclusions. Nevertheless, he believed that the original *Torah* was revealed to Moses by God and maintained that it did not at present exist at all with the Jews due to the major alterations and additions accumulated over the centuries.²⁸

The *Zabūr*, which according to Islamic sources was given to Prophet David (as), seems to be traditionally accepted by Muslims to be related to the book of Psalms, which is found within the third section of the Hebrew Bible called *ketuvim*. The Arabic term *Zabūr* is mentioned nine times in the Qur'an referring to the scripture revealed to Prophet David (as).²⁹ However, there seems to be a lack of written research on whether the two are in any way compatible. Is the book in the Hebrew Bible we find under the heading of the Psalms in any way identifiable as the *Zabūr* revealed to Prophet David? The Book of Psalms consists of 150 poems (psalms) which praise, plead and express gratitude, and articulate passionate trepidation and adoration for God. These hundred and fifty psalms are divided into five parts wherein are also found specific prayers of King David (as) for his son Solomon³⁰ (as) and a repetition of some prayers said by Moses (as) earlier in the Hebrew Bible.³¹ Here it is interesting to note one verse in the Qur'an that reminds the reader, "Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): My servants the righteous, shall inherit the earth".³² Very similar two verses in the Psalms are found that state "But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity"³³ and "The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever".³⁴ The comparison of the above two verses with the one verse of the Qur'an seems to partially demonstrate that the Psalms may relatively be identifiable as the *Zabūr*. Furthermore, according to the rabbinical writings and *Midrash*³⁵ the Psalms were written by King David under the influence of Holy Spirit³⁶. The Talmud³⁷ admits that King David included psalms that were recited by other people before him such as Prophet Moses (as) and Asaph³⁸, but without questioning that the final writing of these psalms were by King David. For instance in the Psalms it is said, "The Holy Spirit sometimes rested on King David before he commenced singing and playing hymns, and he was in fact prompted to the hymns by the Holy Spirit that rested upon him. At other times the Holy Spirit kept away from him, but came upon him as soon as he gave himself up to hymns and praises."³⁹ However, again non-Orthodox Jewish scholars with modern Christian Biblical scholars do not believe in revelation from God and have argued instead that the Psalms were in fact authored by several authors, in addition to King David, at various historical periods, even after him. This especially relates to Psalms 137, which refers to the Babylonian exile (586 BCE) of the Jews from the kingdom of Judea that took place centuries after the lifetime of Prophet David (as).⁴⁰

Whereas the *Tawrāt* and *Zabūr* can be loosely identified in some way or another with the *Torah* and the *Psalms*, the *Injīl* presents a much more complex situation. The dialogue and the polemics found on the topics of Trinity, crucifixion and incarnation over the centuries between Muslims and Christians are immense. However, with regards to the *Injīl* there has been very little stated. The Arabic term *injīl* is mentioned twelve times in the Qur'an denoting the Holy Writ or book that was revealed to Prophet Jesus (as). In the Qur'an, Jesus (as) is reported to have said "*I am indeed a servant of God: He hath given me the book and made me a prophet.*"⁴¹ The verses in the Qur'an are very clear that *Injīl* was a revelation i.e. scripture given to Jesus (as), "*And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law (Tawrāt) that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel (Injīl): therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law (Tawrāt) that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God.*"⁴²

The New Testament is in comparison to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) seen as the second part of the story of salvation and is recognised by most Christians to be divinely inspired.⁴³ It comprises of twenty seven books, but many of these books are short and could be better described as documents. They were all composed between the

year 50 CE and 150 CE in the Greek language. The first books in the New Testament are the four Gospels, which is followed by the book ‘Acts of the Apostles’ and then by twenty-one documents known as Epistles or Letters and finally by the book known as ‘Revelation of St John’. The four Gospels, which are traditionally named after their authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are writings that contain the theological accounts about Jesus and sayings that were attributed to him. The early Christians⁴⁴ wrote many Gospels but only four were accepted into the New Testament in the year 330 by the Nicaea Council. The fifth book ‘Acts of the Apostles’ continues from the story of Jesus by describing the beginning of the Christian Church and its spread in the Roman world. The twenty one Letters that follow in the New Testament are letters written by early Church leaders to various church communities and individuals giving directives and exhortations. Thirteen of these letters were supposed to be written by the apostle Paul and others are attributed to some of the disciples of Jesus. The final book gives the reader information about the apocalypse, (the end of the world), and it is argued by many historians that there may have numerous books on this topic but only the ‘Revelation of St John’ was included in the New Testament. This book is attributed to the disciple John, the author of the Gospel above.⁴⁵

What is not clear is whether the *Injīl* (Gospel) mentioned within the Qur’an is in any way identifiable with the extant gospels and other books used by the Christians in what is today termed the New Testament. According to some Muslim scholars, the *Injīl* mentioned in the Qur’an refers to the words of Jesus and could be related to the canonical gospels in the New Testament or to any of the gospels termed apocryphal by the Church, however, not in its entirety. Others argue that the *Injīl* mentioned within the Qur’an is in no longer in existence and does not relate to the canonical gospels of the New Testament nor any of the gospels termed apocryphal by the Church. Muhammad Hamidullah argued that looking at Jesus’ life it is more likely that he did neither compile nor dictate his words and it was his disciples and their successors who gleaned his utterances and transmitted them to posterity in a number of recessions. Four of these recessions were finally accepted by the Church as canonical gospels and at least 70 gospels were declared by the Church to be apocryphal. In this sense, some words of Jesus can more likely be found within this immense literature.⁴⁶ Ibn Ḥazm as early as the 11th century had instead argued that the four canonical gospels could not be considered the inspired Word of God nor even eyewitness reports after due textual criticism. He saw no true link between the *Injīl* and the gospels of the New Testament.⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya was a little more nuanced when speaking about the Gospel and forwarded this argument, “What is in the *Injīl* [NT] of stories about the crucifixion, his death, his coming to the disciples after he was ‘raised’, are not what Jesus said. Rather they are reports from those who saw these things after him. What God revealed was what was heard [directly] from Jesus who is the transmitter [of God’s word] from Him.”⁴⁸

In the last century, a paradigm shift has occurred in some Christian circles with regard to their theological understanding in the context of comparing the Qur’an with the Bible. The argument instead put forward is that the comparison between the Qur’an and the New Testament is inaccurate, whereas, it is more apt to compare the Qur’an with Jesus since he is recognised by Christians to be the ‘Word of God’. This idea of comparing Christ with the Qur’an seems to have been accredited to Wilfred Cantwell Smith writings in the early 1950’s.⁴⁹ A Christian Theologian, Kenneth Cragg, wrote in a similar line in 1956, “God in revelation is God in Christ. Revelation is not simply recorded in a book; it is embodied in a person. Is it not more fully, more appropriately,

more effectively, revelation for that reason? The question may not be readily appreciated by the Muslim accustomed to the idea of a Book as the point of revelatory impact.”⁵⁰ These circles of Christian academics have later on highlighted that Jesus himself was called the word of God in the Qur’an, “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary...”⁵¹ However, this is where the comparison becomes highly difficult and inaccurate since the meaning of the term ‘Word’ is understood very differently within the two theologies. Amongst majority of Christians the term ‘Word of God’ means literally ‘God incarnate’ especially in the way the term is read within the Gospel of John.⁵² In Islamic theology the term ‘His Word’ from the above Qur’anic verse means that God created Jesus without the agency of a human father; He created Jesus (as) through the word ‘Be’ and he was. The exegetist Shabbir Ahmad Usmani wrote this about the above verse in the Qur’an, “There is a tremendous difference between the divinity of God and holiness of man. The innocence and holiness of the prophets is an image or reflection of Divinity, but not Divinity itself. Jesus was the word of God and spirit of Him. It means he was created merely by the order of God without any masculine agency from the pious body of Mary and God had breathed a spirit from Himself through angel Gabriel into Mary. It means the body of Jesus was the reflection or image of Divine Word and his soul was the image of Divine Spirit while the material side worked as a mirror. But there is a great difference between the image of an object and the object itself...”⁵³ The late scholar Hamidullah stated, “As for Jesus’ life, he had not had the time to compile or dictate what he preached; it is his disciples and their successors who gleaned his utterances and transmitted them to posterity in a number of recessions...”⁵⁴ However, it is precisely due to these recessions that many Muslim scholars have argued that the original *Injīl* as a whole cannot be the four gospels in the New Testament, not to speak of the other books and letters found within it, which from a critical analytical sense seems highly like the product of human beings.

In the Qur’an several names of religions are listed such as Islam, Judaism, Sabian, Christianity, Magian and Polytheism. However, despite the mention of these several religions and their adherents, throughout the Qur’an, the faith of Islam is recognised as an exclusive universal truth. The scriptures of the Jewish and Christian faith both seem to have been given special attention in the Qur’an, and are, it seems, charged in the Qur’an and *aḥadīth* to have been misconstrued (*tahrīf*), altered or substituted (*tabdīl*) and confused (*talbīs*) from the original revealed versions. In the Qur’an, the term *tahrīf* is used four times and other main terms such as *tabdīl* (substitution), *lawā* (distorting the words of scriptures with their twisting tongues), *labb* (overlaying the truth with falsehood), and *kitmān* (suppressing and hiding the truth) are used frequently.⁵⁵ It is however important to recognise that besides the declaration of exclusiveness of Islam as the ‘Truth’ accompanies the strict principle of ‘no compulsion in religion’ and having ‘good relations’ amongst the different *millāt* (religious communities).⁵⁶ Muslim awareness of the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian, owes itself to a very large extent to the Qur’an and the *aḥadīth*.

The scholar Al-Jahiz as early as the mid-9th century CE alluded to the idea of corruption of the text of the New Testament in his research in the genre entitled ‘*Milāl wa al-Nihāl*’ (*Religious Traditions and philosophical Ideologies*). Later on Ibn Ḥazm made the same charge of distortion of the text for both the Hebrew Bible and the four Gospels of the New Testament to the extent that he believed the original scriptures had been

totally lost. However, other scholars such as Ali b. Raban Ṭabarī (d. 847 CE), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956 CE), al-Baghdādī (d. 1037 CE) and Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025 CE) mentioned the alteration of the scriptures of the People of the Book with vague words such as diverging reports, omissions, and deficiencies leading to a notion that these scriptures do contain distortions, but most of it is still identifiable with the original scripture.⁵⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Abū Jā'far al-Ṭabarī both famous for their individual exegeses of the Qur'an, argued that looking at the verses 5:13 and 5:41 it could be argued that there was distortion in the meaning of the text only. However, al-Ṭabarī then continues to argue that the text through such false interpretation was written down and then attributed to God. This seems to lead to a conclusion that at a later time this misinterpretation of the text became parts of the written revealed scriptures, otherwise, how else would it have been attributed to God? Abū 'Abdullāh Al-Qurtubī (d. 1273 CE) in his commentary of the same verse thirteen in *sura al-Mā'idah* agreed that the reference to the term '*tahrīf*' or 'distortion' here meant specifically the changing of the letters and words, and therefore meaning that essentially changes were made to the text itself. There are also specific historical events in Prophet Muhammad's (saw) life, which seem to indicate that distortion occurred through concealment of certain texts. For instance, Abū Jā'far al-Ṭabarī did argue that the event surrounding the revelation of the verses 61:6, 2:147, 2:159 and 7:157 are alluding to Christian and Jewish scholars concealing references to Prophet Muhammad (saw) in their individual scriptures.⁵⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion it is evident from the discussions above that the most popular view amongst majority of Muslim scholars is that the scriptures that the Qur'an approves of and praises are those that were actually revealed to Prophet Moses (as), Prophet David (as) and Prophet Jesus (as). It is also clear from the evidence presented that significant parts of the scriptures have since then been 'distorted' and it is difficult to always ascertain which of these parts are original. Moreover, another view that was advocated by Ibn Ḥazm is that the original Torah and the Gospel have been lost entirely. Yet, the scholar Ibn Taymiyya seems to have deeply differed with Ibn Ḥazm's views. He contended that there were three views amongst Muslims. Those that state that there is no single copy that corresponds to what God revealed in the Torah and Gospel. Meaning that all copies that exist have been altered. For instance, the Torah's transmission from a large number of people to a subsequent great number of people has stopped and the Gospel is taken from four persons. The second group allege that much of what is in the Torah and Gospels today is false, and is not God's word. Amongst them some said that what is false is not that much and others amongst them said that no one changed any text of the scriptures. Instead they argue that the Jews and the Christians falsified the meanings of text by false interpretations. Ibn Taymiyya went onto maintain that many Muslims have held both these views. However, he argued that the correct view is the third opinion. This opinion is that in the world there were true versions of the scriptures until the time of the prophet (peace be upon him) and at the same time there were many versions that had been corrupted. He maintained that there is nothing in the Qur'an to indicate that they had altered all versions. Moreover, he used the verses in the Qur'an that commands the people to judge with what God revealed in the Torah and Gospels as proof for this view.⁵⁹

The best conclusion to this debate is what Ibn Kathīr wrote on this topic in his exegesis of the Qur'an, '*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*'. He maintained that the text of the Gospel and the Hebrew Bible can be divided into three kinds of categories, The first is that which we know is authentic

because we have in Islam what testifies to its truth; secondly, that which we know to be false based on what we have in Islam that contradicts it; and finally, that which is neutral, neither from the first or second type; we neither affirm nor deny it, but we are allowed to transmit and narrate it for further exploration and understanding.⁶⁰

¹ Rāzī, Fakhr al-Din al-, *Tafsīr Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal lil-Buḥūth wa-al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah, 2005 p. 48.

² Hussain, Amjad M., *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Theology*, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 2016.

³ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 21:25

⁴ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 1.

⁵ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 85:21-22.

⁶ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 43:3-4

⁷ Leaman, Oliver (ed), *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, Oxon, 2006, p. 506.

⁸ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 3:40, 10:38

⁹ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 4:163

¹⁰ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 87: 9-19, 53:36-62

¹¹ Cornell Vincent J. (ed.), *Voices of Islam*, Praeger Publishers Inc, 2006, Vol. 5, p. 36

¹² Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 52:3-4

¹³ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 17:55

¹⁴ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 38

¹⁵ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 5:44-46

¹⁶ Hussain, Amjad M., *A Social History of Muslim Education: From the Prophet's Period to Ottoman Times*, Ta-Ha Publishers, London, 2013, p. 127.

¹⁷ All extant versions

¹⁸ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 38.

¹⁹ Referred to also as the Torah and therefore easily confuse it with the specific five books revealed to Moses by the same name.

²⁰ The Old Testament is edited from the same textual source as the Hebrew Bible but may vary in the number of books (chapters), numbering, additions of passages according to the various Church traditions.

²¹ The main division within Judaism today is between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox. The Orthodox defines themselves as the ones who are faithful to the Jewish Laws by the letter while the non-Orthodox comprise of the Reform and Conservative who after being highly influenced by European enlightenment challenged many core values of traditional Judaism including the idea of a direct revelation from God.

²² In the Hebrew Bible this is known as the 'Spirit of Yhwh', 'Spirit of Elohim' and in the Talmud and Midrash it is known as the "Holy Spirit" (ruaha-kodesh) or 'Spirit of the Lord'. Sometimes used instead of shekinah a Hebrew indication of God's Majestic Presence. This should not to be confused with the Holy Spirit as one of three found in Christianity.

²³ Hussain, Amjad M., *The Study of Religions: An Introduction*, Ifav, Istanbul, 2015, pp.76-79.

²⁴ Not to be confused with Zakariyya (as), father of Yahyā (as)

²⁵ Hussain, Amjad M., *The Study of Religions: An Introduction*, Ifav, Istanbul, 2015, pp.76-79.

²⁶ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 4:163-164

- ²⁷ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 106.
- ²⁸ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 86-114.
- ²⁹ Noegel, S. B. & Wheeler, B. M., *The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., Lanham, 2010, p. 350.
- ³⁰ Psalm 72
- ³¹ Psalm 90
- ³² Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 21:105
- ³³ Psalms 37:11
- ³⁴ Psalms 37:29
- ³⁵ Midrash is a succession of discourses and tradition concerned with exegesis; its subject matter is enormous.
- ³⁶ In the Hebrew Bible this is the 'Spirit of Yhwh' and 'Spirit of Elohim' and in the Talmud and Midrash the "Holy Spirit" (Ruaha-Kodesh) or 'Spirit of the Lord'. Sometimes used instead of Shekinah, a Hebrew indication of God's Majestic Presence. Not to be confused with the Holy Spirit as one of three found in Christianity.
- ³⁷ The Talmud is the primary source of Jewish religious law, in addition to the Hebrew Bible in Orthodox Judaism. (also known as Oral Torah)
- ³⁸ Asaph seems to be identified as a scribe and musician who commanded by King David to worship God through song in 1 Chronicles 15:16-17.
- ³⁹ Mid. Psalms 24, p. 204, see <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/tmm/tmm17.htm>
- ⁴⁰ Noegel, S. B. & Wheeler, B. M., *The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., Lanham, 2010, p. 269.
- ⁴¹ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 19:30
- ⁴² Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 5:46
- ⁴³ This is the belief that the writings of the whole of NT were influenced by God through the Holy Spirit, which means that Christians have traditionally designated it as 'the word of God'. Many Liberal Christians today are not able to accept this designation due to the result of biblical higher criticism and look at the NT as a historical document whereas other modernist believer may see NT as 'the Word of God' and leave it ultimately as a matter of faith. See, Metzger B.M. and Coogan M.D., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 302-304.
- ⁴⁴ Besides the above disciples of Jesus (either of the 12 or of the 70) there were other gospels attributed to the disciples of Jesus. These are known as apocryphal Gospels.
- ⁴⁵ Burkett, Delbert, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 4-6.
- ⁴⁶ Hamidullah, Muhammad, *Introduction to Islam*, MWH Publishers, London, 1979, p. 51
- ⁴⁷ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p.118.
- ⁴⁸ Saeed, Abdullāh, *The charge of Distortion of Jews and Christian Scriptures*, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, Fall, 2002, pp. 419-436.
- ⁴⁹ Smith, W. C., *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 17-18.
- ⁵⁰ Cragg, K., *The Call of the Minaret*, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 290.
- ⁵¹ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 4:171
- ⁵² John 1: 1.14
- ⁵³ Usmani, Shabbir Ahmad, *The Noble Qur'an Tafseer –e- Usmani*, Idara Isha'at-e-Diniyat, New Delhi, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 419
- ⁵⁴ Hamidullah, Muhammad, *Introduction to Islam*, MWH Publishers, London, 1979, p. 51
- ⁵⁵ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41

⁵⁶ Ali, Yusuf (tr.), *The Translation of the Holy Qur'an*, Amanah Publishers, USA, 2005, 2:256, 6:108

⁵⁷ Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitan al Fasl fil al-Milāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Hihal*, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 19-41

⁵⁸ Saeed, Abdullāh, *The charge of Distortion of Jews and Christian Scriptures*, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, Fall, 2002, p. 149

⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, DKI, Beirut, 2012, Vol. 1, p. 209.

⁶⁰ Imad al-Din Abu al-Fida Ismail Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Beirut: Dar al-Jil, Vol. I, p.4