



Is the Quran a Retelling of Biblical Stories?

Abstract

Often, Muslims unversed in the science of *Sīrah*, *Ḥadīth*, *Tafsīr*, or '*Aqīdah* grapple with the question of how the Prophet ﷺ could have been such a genuine, novel prophet of God if his holy book almost entirely resembles the Torah and Evangel in its dramatis and locis personae. If the Prophet ﷺ was truly a revelatory man, then why were his expressions of Logos so strikingly similar to the expressions of those before him? For some, the inability to answer these questions leads to a doubt in the prophecy of the Prophet ﷺ. For others, it leads to the faulty conclusion that every religion of God must be some form of internal expression borrowing from a previous archetype. This article argues against these conclusions by arguing, from the ground-up, for the miraculous nature of the Quran. It presents, in order: a proper context of the life of the Unlettered Prophet ﷺ and his personality; the iconoclastic nature of certain Quranic narratives, even in the face of contrasting Biblical precedents; the unique prognostications of the Quranic corpus; its severe warnings against claims of self-authorship; and the ontological necessity of truth-consistency. Understood together, a proper understanding of these five aspects makes any claim against the revelatory nature of the Quran a flagrantly false one.

Introduction

One doubt that often arises in the Muslim mind is whether the Prophet ﷺ ever truly received divine revelation, or whether he ﷺ instead developed a syncretic, Arabicized religion by borrowing thematic stories, elements, and characters from other scriptures, most notably Biblical literature.

[Im]Possibility of Obtaining Historical Reports

The Muslims who grapple with such doubts should understand that such questions are not entirely unprecedented or unheard of. In fact, they have precedent, and even the Quran and ḥadīth literature address them. However, before delving into the question, it is beneficial to first consider the broader context of the Prophet's ﷺ life.

The Prophet ﷺ was born an orphan. His father passed away before his birth, and his mother passed away shortly thereafter. Just two years later, his grandfather, who had since then adopted the Prophet ﷺ, also passed away. Raised without formal education or even a conventional parenthood, he ﷺ could neither read nor write. These circumstances, compounded by the personal hardships he endured, make any notion of extensive research or academic learning almost impossible, and certainly implausible.

Having this context in mind, we may now address the historical objections to the revelation which emanated from the unlettered Prophet.

1. Some disbelievers claimed that the Prophet ﷺ had teachers. Of these supposed teachers, the first was a monk named Baḥīrah or Buḥayrah, whom the Prophet ﷺ may have encountered on a business trip during his youth, at the age of ten or twelve.¹ Considering Buḥayrah's monkhood, these objectors claimed that the Prophet ﷺ learned the broad themes of Biblical literature from Buḥayrah during his meeting with him, and then reproduced those themes in his old age. This claim, however, is easily refutable. The Prophet ﷺ was far too young at the time to have learned an entire religion in the span of one meeting with one monk while on a business trip. Furthermore, if the

¹ Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A'lām*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1992), 55–57.

monk had indeed taught the Prophet ﷺ, those around the Prophet ﷺ, such as his uncle, Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه, and the larger caravan party, would also have observed and acquired such knowledge, and would have been able to better levy objections against the Prophet ﷺ when he claimed a new and idiosyncratic religion.

Apart from the refutation above, one must consider the conspiracy: if a brief encounter with a monk was enough to inspire the young Muḥammad ﷺ to establish a rigorously comprehensive religion thirty years later, one would assume that the Prophet ﷺ established the religion to achieve popularity, wealth, status, or fame. However, multiple instances wherein he ﷺ was offered wealth, status, and power in exchange for abandoning his mission demonstrate the Prophet's ﷺ resolute steadfastness to his new religion. His commitment to spreading the message never wavered, even in the face of extreme torture and hardship, proving that his mission was driven by divine truth rather than personal ambition. Even if one wanted to argue that his generation of a new religion was on account of inspiration, and that his steadfastness was on account of belief in his own generation, then one is still forced to grapple with how the content of such a comprehensive religion overflowing with its share of “Biblical” stories could have been produced from a single meeting with a single monk, the historicity of which itself is dubious.

2. A second objection involves a Jewish blacksmith who was not a native Arabic speaker. This theory is similarly absurd, as the mastery and peak of the Arabic language during the sixth century made it impossible for a non-native speaker to produce something on par with the Quran. Allah ﷻ Himself swiftly addresses and refutes such doubts with a simple and profound response:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِّسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ
وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

Truly, We know that they say, “It was just a human that taught him!” The language they insinuate is foreign, but this [Revelation] is in an evident, Arabic tongue.²

² Qur’ān 16:103.

The Divine logos offers a compelling argument; it is evident that whoever “wrote” the Quran must have been a native Arabic speaker, considering it is inconceivable that a non-Arab could master the Arabic language well enough to thereafter produce a work of unparalleled eloquence and depth. The Quran is composed in a variety of poetic and prosaic styles on diverse topics, none of which mimic or replicate known Arabic literary forms. Its unique composition has rendered even native speakers incapable of crafting a comparable response. This phenomenon underscores why it is so rare to find poets excelling in languages other than their native tongues. Even in such cases, they are seldom recognized as the greatest in their field, let alone as authors of works so definitive that they set grammatical rules and define vocabulary within that language. The Quran’s ability to establish the standard for the Arabic language, a feat unprecedented among native speakers, renders the suggestion that a non-native could have achieved such a feat absurd. Further emphasizing this point is the Arabic term for non-Arabic speakers: the term *‘ajam*, which literally refers to a “mute brute,” reflecting the Arabs’ immense pride in their language’s depth and beauty as a carrier of meaning and aesthetic wordplay. Their pride makes it clear that the accusations leveled against the Prophet ﷺ were not only baseless, but also lacked genuine conviction—desperate attempts to discredit him and see what might stick to the wall of accusation.

3. Others suggest that the Prophet’s ﷺ claim involves Waraqah ibn Nawfal رضي الله عنه, the cousin of Khadijah al-Kubra رضي الله عنها who acknowledged the Prophet’s ﷺ first revelation and who was a scholar of both Hebrew and Syriac, as well as Judaic literature. However, Waraqah رضي الله عنه passed away shortly after his consolation of the Prophet ﷺ. The notion that he could have taught the Prophet ﷺ everything necessary to produce the Quran over the following twenty-three years is nomologically implausible. Additionally, it is important to note that the Quran was revealed progressively, often in response to specific events, including questions of Jews and Christians about specific Biblical events or characters. To predicate such events far into the future is even more extraordinary than to claim revelation.³

The disbelievers’ contradictory accusations further highlight the baselessness of their claims. They accused the Prophet ﷺ of being a magician, an insane person, a poet, and an exceptional student all at the same time. The sheer randomness and inconsistency

³ This point is Occam’s Razor at play. The simplest conclusion is often the most logical.

of these allegations demonstrate their lack of evidence or substance. If any single accusation had merit, they would have focused on that one claim. Instead, their scattershot approach belies an undertone of desperation.

The above events and the refutability of their contrived implications make it abundantly clear that the Quran was not authored by any human. A closer examination only reinforces the conclusion that the Quran is, and has always been, the divine revelation of Allah ﷻ.

Another aspect to consider is that, unlike the Quran, the other scriptures were not readily accessible to the common man following their revelation. The Bible was only first translated from the original Greek and Hebrew into contemporary Anglo-Saxon languages in the sixteenth century, by Martin Luther.⁴ The Torah was clearly not available to the common person, considering the Jews had centralized religious information into elitist circles. As such, the Prophet's ﷺ only exposure to the Torah was in confrontation with the Jews, who themselves only ever brought up such narrative phenomena which already existed therein, or presented questions before him to challenge the Prophet.⁵

Furthermore, our Master, the Prophet ﷺ, never claimed authorship of the Quran, despite having everything to gain by doing so. The Quran left the Arabs utterly astonished, and they were unable to refute its eloquence and message. Yet, the Prophet ﷺ consistently attributed the Quran to Allah ﷻ, and never to himself. This unwavering claim, despite the worldly challenges it brought, remains a testament to his sincerity and the divine origin of the Quran.

Moreover, there are numerous instances where the Prophet ﷺ was divinely corrected through revelation, even in situations where no human could have reprimanded him. 'Abd-Allāh ibn Umm Maktūm ﷺ, a blind companion, approached the Prophet ﷺ to ask a question while the Prophet ﷺ was deeply engaged in pleading with influential Arab leaders to stop their persecution of Muslims and accept the new faith. The Prophet ﷺ, in that moment of urgency, frowned and turned away from the blind man's

4 Musée protestant, "Martin Luther, Translator of the Bible — Musée Protestant," March 25, 2024, <https://museeprotestant.org/en/notice/martin-luther-translator-of-the-bible/>.

5 Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 2002), 168 (Sūrah al-Kahf and the three questions from the Jews, whom the Quraysh had to approach to even obtain Toraic questions to ask the Prophet ﷺ in the first place).

interruption. Though ‘Abd-Allāh ﷺ could not have seen this gesture, nor could any Muslim criticize the Prophet ﷺ for feeling frustrated at such a pivotal moment of conversation, the Quran still revealed verses addressing this incident, forever admonishing the Prophet’s ﷺ behavior.⁶

This incident raises a critical question: what worldly benefit would there be in making such a story public? No one present at the time could have known about this private moment, nor was it necessarily blameful for the Prophet ﷺ to have felt the way he did. Furthermore, the admonishing chapter was revealed during the Makkan era, when every single follower mattered and the need to garner and retain reputе was at an all-time high. Nevertheless, the revelation ensured that it became known to all, emphasizing the Prophet’s ﷺ humility and accountability to Allah ﷻ. Would someone seeking power and glory voluntarily expose such an incident, especially when it could have easily been hidden? Such transparency is profoundly incompatible with the motives of a person seeking personal gain, further proving the divine nature of the Quran and the integrity of the Prophet ﷺ. This idea is only further corroborated by other verses which threaten the Prophet ﷺ if he ﷺ should ever fabricate his own stories or tales. These verses are vicious, sometimes even macabre:

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ ﴿٤٤﴾ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ﴿٤٥﴾ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ
الْوَتِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

If he were to forge some lies against Us, We would take him by the strong arm [of vengeance], and then We would cut his jugular from him.⁷

No self-authoring charlatan would devise such merciless punishments against themselves in their own authoritative texts unless they themselves were not the author of the text in question, nor meant to be the author.

6 Qur’ān, chapter 80 (Sūrah ‘Abasa).

7 Qur’ān 69:44–46.

Historical Corrections

Thereafter, the Quran often corrects stories that were misrepresented in the previous scriptures. For example, any story which violates the infallibility of the Prophets ﷺ is rejected. Take the verse of the Quran:

فَاصْبِرْ كَمَا صَبَرَ أُولُو الْعَزْمِ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ

*So be patient like those the messengers of great resolve were patient.*⁸

Here, there is a complete absolvment of any wrongdoing by these specific prophets ﷺ, and Nūḥ عليه السلام is considered amongst them.⁹ Stories like the Tower of Babel are implicitly refuted in the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

*O people! Indeed We created you as men and women, and We made you into tribes and villages so that you may come to know one another.*¹⁰

This clearly refutes the Biblical story that the people tried to construct a tower to “reach” God and God stopped them by splitting them up into tribes. This verse instead affirms that men and women existed in tribes from the very onset of creation.¹¹ Furthermore, the very concept of the devil is fundamentally changed; he is not the punisher of Hell but punished in Hellfire himself.

لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنكَ وَمِمَّن تَبَعَكَ مِنْهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

*I will certainly fill Hellfire with you (Iblīs; Lucifer) and those who follow you.*¹²

Even fundamental Jewish and Christian concepts are principally negated by the Quran,

⁸ Qur’ān 46:35.

⁹ There exist even more explicit clarifications in ḥadīth literature, but we have limited such verifications to the Qur’ānic text for now.

¹⁰ Qur’ān 49:13.

¹¹ Considering the raison d’être is given explicitly in the verse: “So that you may come to know one another.”

¹² Qur’ān 38:85.

such as Jewish supremacy,¹³ Christian monasticism,¹⁴ Jacob's fast from food,¹⁵ and the Trinity of God.¹⁶ The purported Arabization of the Bible should not requisite the corruption of its most fundamental tenets.

Quranic details of Biblical stories also occasionally directly oppose their Biblical narratives. When speaking about the watery fate of Pharaoh, the Quran asserts that his body was preserved. The Biblical Exodus tells us that of all the host of Pharaoh that followed the Israelites into the sea, there remained not so much as one of them,¹⁷ whereas the Quranic narrative puts forth the following asseveration from God Himself:

فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِدَنِكَ لَتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلْفَكَ ءَايَةً

*Today, then, We shall preserve your body so that you may be a sign for those to come.*¹⁸

The above was in regards to stories of the past. However, the Quran also accurately accounts for future events as well. The most famous of such examples is the opening of Chapter 30:

الْم غَلِبَتِ الرُّومُ ﴿٢١﴾ فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ غَلِبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ فِي بَضْعِ سِنِينَ ۚ لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِن قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدُ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

*Alif Lām Mīm. The Romans (Byzantines)¹⁹ have been defeated. In a nearby land, but after their defeat, they will soon be victorious in just a few years. To Allah belongs the matter, before and after. And on that day, the believers will rejoice.*²⁰

At the time of these verses' revelation, the Byzantines looked utterly defeated and on

¹³ Qur'an 5:18 (against their favoritism); Qur'an 3:21 (against their killing of the prophets, and thus a refutation of their belief in the concept of Machloket, or the idea that they have dominion over the religious law and may "debate" with God). See also Qur'an 2:146 and 61:6, which expressly contradict the Jews' denial of Muḥammad's ﷺ Prophethood by referencing them to their own scriptures.

¹⁴ Qur'an 57:27.

¹⁵ Qur'an 3:93.

¹⁶ Qur'an 5:73.

¹⁷ Exodus 14:28.

¹⁸ Qur'an 10:92.

¹⁹ We refer to the Roman Empire as the Byzantines for historical purposes.

²⁰ Qur'an 30:1-4.

their last legs. Not only is this fact attested to by historical sources across the known world, it is illustrated even in a bet between Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq رضي الله عنه and an idolater on whether the Byzantines would triumph over the Sasanians within a certain number of years, with extremely favorable odds for Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه.²¹ No intelligent man would ever stake his veracity on such a claim, and no intelligent man would ever make such a bet if he felt that he was going to lose it. Had the Quran been a mere quotation of Biblical scripture, it would not have had the gall to bet its reputation on such farfetched predictions which nonetheless ultimately came true.

Consistency is a Necessity, Not a Flaw

A final point to keep in mind is the idea that truth will necessarily coincide with itself. For the Quran to speak about familiar figures recognizable to the denizens of Arabia is far more optimal than for it to speak about prophets of China or India who are unfamiliar, and thus unbeloved, to the Arabs or Jews of the area. As such, considering it speaks of familiar figures whose stories are also mentioned in other celestial books which were, at one point, uncorrupted, it follows that the Quran will necessarily exhibit some similarity to its celestial forebears. In fact, for the Quran to not have exhibited any similarity would have been even more peculiar. The Jews and Christians would have experienced dissonant resentment against the new Book, and the Arabs would have raised eyebrows at just how anomalous the Quran was from books it itself claimed to confirm.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ

And We sent down to you the Book with the truth, to confirm the scripture that existed before it, and to be authoritative over it.

This single verse highlights both that the Quran was revealed to exhibit similarity with the previous scriptures in accurate thematic elements, but also dissimilarity in moments where it was forced to go against them in law or narrative detail.

Additionally, the Quran itself attests to containing similar elements as the Jews' and

²¹ A ratio of 1:100. See Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, ḥadīth 3194.

Christians' scriptures so that the Jews and Christians may themselves approach the Quran with a more charitable mindset:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ

Say, "O People of the Book! Come forth to a word that is equal between us and you..."

Some narratives of the Quran are also explicitly pre-Judaic, in that the content they hold constitutes equal ground for all celestial books. The Quran says when speaking about Abraham:

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

O People of the Book! Why do you debate [with us] about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospel were only revealed after him? Have you then no sense?

As such, Biblical themes in the Quran exist therein for a multitude of reasons:

1. A common source (God) will naturally requisite some similarity in familiar narratives.
2. The Quran itself claims to confirm those elements of the Bible which are true.
3. The Quran shares Biblical narratives not for reasons of unoriginality, but, operating on the first premise, to allow for charitable conversation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.
4. The Quran often discusses figures who themselves existed before the Torah and the Gospel. As such, their narrative existence cannot be a necessary derivative of sources which come after them.

Conclusion

Therefore, the presence of similar stories in the Quran should not create doubt regarding its syncretic unoriginality, for several reasons:

1. It has already been thoroughly proven that it was impossible for the Prophet ﷺ to learn any substantial amount of Biblical information. As such, similarities between an inimitable revelation—which should have been impossible to produce for an unlettered orphan of the Arabian desert with no formal education—and prior scripture should not generate doubt but instead inspire confidence in the truth of its divinity.
2. If the Quran was purely plagiarism, then its “author” would not have operated with the freedom to correct fundamental mistakes, nor would he have added predictions of his own. Both Quranic features demonstrate the Quran’s unique status as the final revelation.
3. The Quran affirms the Bible and Torah as revealed scriptures from Allah which were corrupted thereafter by men. However, considering their original similarity, it follows that some similarities in thematic elements will naturally exist. These similarities, rather than stimulating aversion to the Quranic narrative, should once again inspire confidence in its truth. A historian who says the first president was “Joe Thomas”²² will naturally be understood to be a liar, but if a historian affirms George Washington as the first president yet denies he ever cut down a cherry tree in his youth, the astuteness of the latter historian, rather than stimulating aversion, instead inspires confidence in the historicity of his narrative. Truth by necessity requires consistency. It is impossible for two different sets of equations with different values to arrive at the same answer. Likewise, when reporting history, it is a sign of truth that major figures recur across accounts—especially considering the Prophet’s ﷺ previously stated environmental limitations.

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²² A hypothetical, invented name used for illustration.

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