

That's a Good Answer

By I.L.

Editor's note: *With this issue we are beginning a series of articles entitled 'That's a Good Answer.' It will be almost like a regular column if we can get enough people to respond or contribute. As many know, there are a number of issues that continually arise in our interactions with Muslims. Other subjects come out less frequently. Nevertheless, the writer of this column has launched us on our pathway. What we have here is our writer's reply to the oft-heard charge, 'Christians changed the Bible.' Please read, reflect and let us have your reactions to it. At the same time, let us have your suggestions as to what should be treated next. Perhaps you have 'a good answer' out of your experience.*

Today's Question:

You Changed Your Bible, Right?

There are several good answers to this question. Most Muslims are impervious to any answer that looks at the evidence. They have been taught that the Bible has been changed, so any evidence to the contrary must be wrong. Therefore, the earlier answers below show them that the Bible was not, cannot and could not have been changed. The later answers concerning the actual documentary evidence can be useful to confirm this, once the initial objection is answered.

Answer One:

Jesus Accepted the Old Testament

Was Jesus a prophet? Did he know the Torah? Did Jesus always speak the truth? The prophet Jesus would have known if the Torah had been corrupted. Jesus did not correct the Torah. The

Torah we have now is exactly the same as the Torah Jesus had. The Jews and the Christians, (both Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) all read the same Torah. Why don't we read the first part of the Torah, the book of Genesis?

From there, you can begin to lay foundations by reading Genesis.^{1, 2}

Answer Two:

The Three Questions

- 'Is God powerful enough to protect His Word?'
- 'Does the Injil come from God?'
- 'So how could God allow his Word to be changed? Impossible!'

When I was first taught this, I was totally unconvinced by the questions; my reasoning betrayed my past and my worldview. To many Muslims these questions are very powerful: the questions appeal to some of the strongest beliefs they hold. They can be quickly said, even when someone does not really want to hear a good answer, and the questions can remain as a riddle, which can only be resolved when they are ready for more. Be aware that such a riddle is both a strength and a weakness: a strength in that it gives them something to chew over; a weakness in that the underlying problem (that their final authority, the Qur'an, still apparently says the Bible is corrupted) has not been addressed.

Answer Three:

'Yes, ... But...'

I agree the Bible has been corrupted. The Christians Muhammad met had

corrupted their Bible. Muhammad was right to criticise the Jews and the Christians. Nevertheless, the Christians Muhammad met relied on oral tradition. The Bible was not translated into Arabic until about 720 AD; that means after the time of Muhammad. However, the Christians in Egypt, Syria and Rome did have the Bible in their own language. Our Bible today comes from these sources. Muhammad was right to say that the Bible the Christians he met was corrupted, but the Bible we have has not been changed.

Years ago I read a book about bargaining and negotiating. I learned there that a good way to outwit an opponent was to agree with them and to show how right they were, but right only under certain circumstances. In short, we agree with the objection, which usually surprises and delights, then limit the agreement and go on to explain how both of us are right. This answer may be a new one to most readers. It has the advantage of identifying with a Muslim, of agreeing with some of the concerns Muhammad had and leaving Muslims able to agree that Muhammad was right and that Christians are right. Muhammad and the Qur'an are *not* challenged—they are simply restricted.³

Answer Four:

The Manuscript Evidence

The evidence from the manuscripts is vast. If you want to read more, I could find you something. I will give you just one example. Have you heard of the Dead Sea scrolls? Good. Have you ever

read the book of the prophet Isaiah? No? You should. In the ninth century, our earliest copy of this dated back to the eighth century. Copies of the book of Isaiah were then discovered, dated the second century before Christ. Take chapter 53, which in Hebrew contains 166 words. After over ten centuries of copying, there were only seventeen letters different: ten are simply a matter of spelling, four concern minor stylistic changes such as conjunctions, and three concern the addition of a word to verse 11 which does not change the sense of the sentence.

Possible follow-on literature includes:

- Shenk, *The Holy Book of God*.
- Campbell, *The Qur'an and the Bible in the Light of History and Science*.⁴
- *Lire la Bible*.⁵
- Call of Hope:⁶

The Infallibility of the Torah and the Gospel (booklet and tape).

Gilchrist, *The Bible is the Word of God*—the textual history of the Qur'an and the Bible. This is a reply to Deedat and deals specifically with his objections. Read the English first to check if these questions are being asked by the people you deal with.

- Finlay, *Face the facts*.
- Miller, *Beliefs and Practices of Christians*.
- McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, chapters 1-4.

Sometimes this evidence is helpful, usually in addition to other answers. However, if we use it, and if people are willing to consider documentary evidence, we need to be ready for extra questions in the same area, such as the

widespread belief that the Church Councils supposedly decided what was in the Canon and the accusation that the errors we supposedly believe come from Paul, not from Jesus.

**Answer Five:
The Essential Truths
Have Not Been Changed**

What do all true Christians believe? You know that we believe Jesus is God. We believe that he died upon a Cross, and that he rose again. We also believe in the authority and accuracy of the Bible. Well, the earliest manuscript we have dates from AD 135, which contains the early chapters of John 1, in which Jesus as God is clearly taught. Then when we turn to Paul, we find in 1 Corinthians 15:1-9 that these facts are stated. This passage was written in AD 55 and was so widely known that it was quoted by Clement in AD 96 and Polycarp in AD 107. I know the Bible has not been changed. Nevertheless, even if it has been changed in places, the essential truths are here.

This was the argument that convinced me most as a youth when I battled with the accuracy of the Bible. I now regard it as good supporting evidence and for someone who really wants to know.

Conclusion

Each answer leads in a predictable direction, and this should influence our choice of answer. I usually use more than one answer, frequently using the first three in that order, and try to observe which reply they most

relate to. Having established that our Scriptures are reliable and trustworthy, we can then encourage people to read the Bible for themselves. Of course there are other barriers—many are scared to read the Bible because they have been taught that it is forbidden, and we may need to address these issues in love, prayer and discussion.

Footnotes

- 1 See Wendall Evans' article on the use of Genesis 1-3 in Bible study with Muslims, *Seedbed*, vol. 12/3, 1997, pp. 16-20. See also the PALM CD, pdf\others\GenesisEn.pdf also found at www.takwin-masihi.org.
- 2 Sometimes people know about the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says 'You have heard... but I say'. This confirms that Jesus knew the Torah, and confirmed its accuracy but went on to give a more in-depth interpretation. This is a supplementary point sometimes worth adding.
- 3 Geisler NL & Nix WE, *A General introduction to the Bible*, (Moody Press, 1968), p. 326 is my authority. They say 'Muhammad (570-632), the founder of Islam, knew of the Gospel story through the oral tradition only, and this was based on Syriac sources.'
- 4 Found in print or various Internet sources in English, French and Arabic. Try the Palm CD, and various sites for answering Islam, e.g. <http://answering-islam.org>, <http://answering-islam.org.uk> or <http://answering-islam.de/main/>.
- 5 Found on the PALM CD, pdf\others\LireLaBible.
- 6 For Arabic and English versions of their material see www.the-good-way.com. Gilchrist's material is published by Call of Hope and available at the answering Islam sites.