

## THE PROBLEM WITH ISLAM

Islam is said to be the fastest-growing religion in the world, and only Christianity has more adherents.<sup>1</sup> Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam preaches one God,<sup>2</sup> and holds Abraham in high esteem.<sup>3</sup> Like Christianity, Islam speaks of the mercy and forgiveness of God<sup>4</sup> and promises eternal life to those who follow its teachings,<sup>5</sup> while warning of God's ultimate judgment upon the wicked.<sup>6</sup> So is there any difference between Christianity and Islam, between the New Testament and the Muslim holy book, the Qur'ân (or Koran)? There is all the difference in the world.

The Qur'ân immodestly calls itself a perfect book, a revelation of God's truth, without flaws or contradictions.<sup>7</sup> The great proof that Islam is true, according to Muslims and the Qur'ân itself, is that its founder, Muhammad,<sup>8</sup> a man who was said to be illiterate, could produce a book of such poetry, elegance, quality, and substance.<sup>9</sup> But for me, the Qur'ân itself

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<sup>1</sup> *Fast-growing Islam winning converts in Western world*, April 14, 1997, on CNN Interactive World News, found at <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9704/14/egypt.islam/>.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see the following verses in the Qur'ân: 2:255, 3:6, 3:18, 3:62, 5:73, 6:19, 6:102, 6:106, 9:31, 29:46, 37:4, 37:35, 38:65, 39:6, 40:3, 40:65, 41:6, 44:8, 47:19, 59:22, 59:23, 73:9, 112:1. (The Qur'ân has 114 chapters, each of which is named. For example, Chapter 2 is "The Cow." For convenience, only chapter numbers, not chapter names, are used in citations herein.)

<sup>3</sup> Qur'ân, 2:130, 2:135, 3:67-68, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 16:120-123.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'ân, 1:3, 2:37, 2:54, 2:160, 2:173, 2:182, 2:218, 2:235, 3:30-31, 3:74, 3:89, 3:155, 4:25, 4:29, 4:43, 4:64, 4:96, 4:99-100, 4:106, 4:110, 4:152, 5:3, 5:34, 5:39, 5:74, 5:98, 6:54, 8:69-70, 9:27, 9:102, 16:18, 16:47, 17:25, 24:22, 25:6, 25:70, 26:9, 33:5, 33:24, 33:43, 33:50, 33:59, 33:73, 34:2, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'ân, 11:108, 18:30-31, 25:15-16, 39:73-75, 43:69-73, 82:13, 83:22-24.

<sup>6</sup> Qur'ân, 4:168-169, 5:10, 18:49, 21:47, 23:102-103, 33:63-68, 33:73, 34:3-5, 39:68-72, 56:1-9, 69:13-18, 77:1-37, 81:1-14, 82:1-5, 82:9-19.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Qur'ân, 39:27-28 says:

We have given mankind in this Koran all manner of parables, so that they may take heed: a Koran in the Arabic tongue, free from any flaw, that they may guard themselves against evil.

(All quotes from the Qur'ân are from *The Koran*, translated with notes by N. J. Dawood (Penguin Books 1999).) See also Qur'ân, 2:176, 4:82, 6:66, 17:105, 18:1, 41:41-42, 69:40-43, 98:1-3.

<sup>8</sup> See the Appendix to this paper for a brief history of the life of Muhammad and the early years of Islam.

<sup>9</sup> Qur'ân, 10:38, 11:12-14, 16:103, 28:48-49, 52:33-34

conclusively proves that Islam cannot possibly be from God. For the problem with Islam is that the Qur'ân lacks credibility. It just doesn't ring true.

The Prophet's Special Rules. For example, what shall we say about a book which prohibits men from marrying more than four wives (and warns about the dangers of marrying more than one),<sup>10</sup> yet grants an exclusive God-given exemption from this rule for one man: its prophet and founder, Muhammad,<sup>11</sup> who had thirteen wives after his first wife died?<sup>12</sup> Nor is this the Qur'ân's only special rule for Muhammad. When he promised to avoid a certain slave-girl, the Qur'ân says that God gave him a revelation that not only excused him from this pledge, but chastised two of his wives in the bargain.<sup>13</sup> God grants Muhammad permission to marry the divorced wife of

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<sup>10</sup> See the Qur'ân, 4:3:

If you fear that you cannot treat orphans [orphan girls] with fairness, then you may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three, or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot maintain equality among them, marry one only or any slave-girls you may own. This will make it easier for you to avoid injustice.

<sup>11</sup> See the Qur'ân, 33:50:

Prophet, We have made lawful for you the wives to whom you have granted dowries and the slave-girls whom God has given you as booty; the daughters of your paternal and maternal uncles and of your paternal and maternal aunts who fled with you; and any believing woman who gives herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to take in marriage. **This privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believer.** We well know the duties We have imposed on the faithful concerning their wives and slave-girls. [We grant you this privilege] so that none may blame you. God is ever forgiving and merciful.

(Emphasis supplied.)

<sup>12</sup> In fairness, some of Muhammad's marriages were acts of diplomacy, in an effort to build alliances through matrimony, while others were acts of kindness to widows of slain Muslims. Nevertheless, the Qur'ân recognizes no such exception for any other Muslim, regardless of the circumstances.

<sup>13</sup> See the Qur'ân, 66:1-5:

Prophet, why do you prohibit that which God has made lawful for you, in seeking to please your wives? God is forgiving and merciful. God has given you absolution from such oaths. God is your Master. He is the Omniscient One, the Wise One. When the Prophet confided a secret to one of his wives; and when she disclosed it and God informed him of this, he made known one part of it and said nothing about the other. And when he had acquainted her with it she said: "Who told you this?" He replied: "The Wise One, the All-knowing, told me." If you two [Hafsah and Aishah] turn to God in penitence (for your hearts have sinned) you shall be pardoned; but if you conspire against him, know that God is his protector, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the faithful. The angels too are his helpers. It may well be that, if he divorce you, his Lord will give him in your place better wives than

his adopted son, Zayd.<sup>14</sup> The Qur'ân contains detailed instructions to Muhammad's followers to protect the privacy of the Prophet,<sup>15</sup> as well as the chastity of his wives,<sup>16</sup> and even forbids his wives to remarry (presumably after divorce or Muhammad's death).<sup>17</sup> The Qur'ân forbids Muslims to "speak ill" of Muhammad.<sup>18</sup> These special rules, which are suspiciously convenient for him personally, raise doubts about Muhammad's good faith concerning at least some of his claimed revelations. Yet this is only one of many reasons to question the Qur'ân's claim to divine authority.

Discrepancies with the Old Testament. The Qur'ân explicitly acknowledges that parts of the Old and New Testaments are from God, and declares that the Qur'ân corroborates these previous Scriptures:

He has revealed to you the Book with the Truth, confirming the scriptures which preceded it; for He has already revealed the Torah and the Gospel for the guidance of mankind, and the distinction between right and wrong.<sup>19</sup>

The Qur'ân contains many references to people in the Old Testament, including Noah, Moses, Abraham, Ishmael, and Joseph. However, the Qur'ân displays considerable ignorance about the Hebrew Scriptures, because what the Qur'ân says about these people is simply not consistent with the stories told in the Old Testament.

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yourselves, submissive to God and full of faith, obedient, penitent, devout, and given to fasting; both formerly-wedded and virgins.

A footnote adds: "Muhammad, we are told, was once found by his wife Hafsah with a Coptic slave from whom he had promised her to separate. Of this Hafsah secretly informed Aishah, another wife of his. To free Muhammad from his promise to Hafsah was the object of this chapter. Some of the references are obscure." See *The Koran*, translated with notes by N. J. Dawood (Penguin Books 1999), p. 398, fn. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Qur'ân, 33:37-38

<sup>15</sup> Qur'ân, 33:53

<sup>16</sup> Qur'ân, 33:32-33; see also 33:53

<sup>17</sup> Qur'ân, 33:53

<sup>18</sup> Qur'ân, 33:53; another translation is that Muslims should not "give trouble" to Muhammad. See *The Qur'an*, translated by M. H. Shakir (Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., Elmhurst, New York, 12th U.S. ed. 2001), p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'ân, 3:3. See also, 2:89, 2:91, 2:101, 5:48, 10:37, 46:12, 46:29-30.

## Joseph

For example, the story of Joseph in the Qur'ân is very different from the Biblical version, beginning with Joseph's dreams about his family members bowing down to him. In Genesis, he tells these dreams to his brothers, which further arouses their anger and jealousy.<sup>20</sup> But in the Qur'ân, Joseph tells the dream only to his father, Israel (Jacob), who cautions him not to repeat it to his brothers, "lest they plot evil against you."<sup>21</sup> In Genesis, Israel later sends Joseph to check on his brothers and the flocks they are tending, and the brothers begin to plot against him when they see him coming.<sup>22</sup> However, as the Qur'ân tells the story, the brothers ask Israel to let them take Joseph with them; their father seems to foresee their plan, and says, "I fear lest the wolf should eat him when you are off your guard."<sup>23</sup> Of course, in Genesis, when the brothers later return with the story that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal, Israel is completely fooled.<sup>24</sup> But not so in the Qur'ân, where Israel says, "No! . . . Your souls have tempted you to evil."<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most striking difference occurs when Joseph is falsely accused of trying to rape the wife of his Egyptian slave-master, Potiphar. In Genesis, Potiphar orders Joseph to be immediately imprisoned.<sup>26</sup> But in the Qur'ân's version of the story, the wife's accusation is investigated and actually discovered to be false:

"If his shirt is torn from the front," said one of her people, "she is speaking the truth and he is lying. If it is torn from behind, then he is speaking the truth and she is lying."

And when her husband saw that Joseph's shirt was rent from behind, he said to her: "This is but one of your tricks. Your cunning is great indeed! Joseph, say no more about this. Woman, ask pardon for your sin. You have assuredly done wrong."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 37:4-11

<sup>21</sup> Qur'ân, 12:4-5

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 37:12-24

<sup>23</sup> See the Qur'ân, 12:11-13. The Qur'ân does not explain why Israel let Joseph go despite these concerns.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 37:31-35

<sup>25</sup> Qur'ân, 12:18

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 39:7-20

<sup>27</sup> Qur'ân, 12:26-29. Indeed, the wife eventually confesses that she lied. Qur'ân, 12:50-53.

To explain why Joseph is eventually imprisoned—which is of course necessary to the rest of the story—the Qur’ân simply states: “Yet, for all the evidence they had seen, they thought it right to jail him for a time.”<sup>28</sup>

Nor is this the last of the inconsistencies in the story of Joseph. In Genesis, Pharaoh’s dream prompts the cupbearer to tell him about Joseph, who had correctly interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and the chief baker while imprisoned.<sup>29</sup> But in the Qur’ân, the cupbearer goes to Joseph in prison in order to ask for the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream.<sup>30</sup> In both Genesis and the Qur’ân, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of Egypt. However, in the Old Testament story, Pharaoh does this because he is so impressed with Joseph’s successful interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream,<sup>31</sup> whereas in the Qur’ân Joseph requests this authority: “Joseph said: ‘Give me charge of the granaries of the land. I shall husband them wisely.’”<sup>32</sup> When Joseph’s brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, the Qur’ân, unlike Genesis, says that Joseph discloses his identity to Benjamin at their initial meeting.<sup>33</sup>

### Moses

As with Joseph, most of the stories about Moses in the Qur’ân parallel those in the Old Testament, but with a few significant differences. For example, in Exodus, Moses is rescued and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter;<sup>34</sup> in the Qur’ân this is done by Pharaoh’s wife.<sup>35</sup> In both Exodus and the Qur’ân, Moses’ mother is chosen to nurse the infant Moses, but in the Qur’ân, unlike Exodus, this occurs only after he refuses to nurse from other women.<sup>36</sup> Moses’ murder of an Egyptian is presented in the Qur’ân, but with two variations from the Biblical story: (1) rather than an Egyptian beating the Hebrew slave, as in Exodus, the two men are fighting and the Hebrew asks for Moses’ help; and (2) the next day, Moses finds the Hebrew fighting another man and realizes that the Hebrew is simply a “quarrelsome man.”<sup>37</sup> When Moses flees to Midian, the Qur’ân says that he was required to serve his wife’s father for eight years in return for her hand in marriage; Exodus says nothing

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<sup>28</sup> Qur’ân, 12:35

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 40:5 - 41:13

<sup>30</sup> Qur’ân, 12:43-50

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 41:38-44

<sup>32</sup> Qur’ân, 12:55

<sup>33</sup> Compare Genesis 43:16-44:3 with the Qur’ân, 12:68-70, and especially 12:69.

<sup>34</sup> Exodus 2:5-10

<sup>35</sup> Qur’ân, 28:7-13, and especially 28:9

<sup>36</sup> Compare the Qur’ân, 28:11-13 with Exodus 2:7-9.

<sup>37</sup> Compare the Qur’ân, 28:15-18 with Exodus 2:11-14.

of this requirement.<sup>38</sup> In Exodus, God refers to Himself several times as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”<sup>39</sup> However, the Qur’ân never uses this phrase<sup>40</sup>—perhaps because Islam traces its roots through Abraham’s other son, Ishmael, who is elevated to the status of a prophet in the Qur’ân.<sup>41</sup>

When Moses reaches Egypt to confront Pharaoh, more differences arise. In the Qur’ân, the Egyptian magicians become convinced of Moses’ divine authority after the first miracle, in which Aaron’s staff<sup>42</sup> becomes a serpent and swallows the magicians’ staffs; in Exodus, the magicians remain unconvinced until after the fourth miracle, the plague of flies (or gnats).<sup>43</sup> Of course, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened and he refuses to allow the Israelites to leave. However, Exodus and the Qur’ân differ about how this hardening occurred. In Exodus, Pharaoh hardens his own heart at first, and later God hardens it further.<sup>44</sup> But in the Qur’ân, this hardening results from a prayer of Moses which is granted by God:

“Lord,” said Moses, “You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his nobles splendour and riches in this life, so that they may stray from Your path. Lord, destroy their riches and harden their hearts, so that they shall persist in unbelief until they face the woeful scourge.”

He replied: “Your prayer shall be answered. Follow the straight path and do not walk in the footsteps of ignorant men.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Compare the Qur’ân, 28:27 with Exodus 2:21. The Qur’ân’s author may have Moses confused with Jacob, who was required to work 14 years for his uncle, Laban—seven for each of Laban’s two daughters, Leah and Rachel. See Genesis 29:15-28.

<sup>39</sup> Exodus 3:6, 3:15, 3:16, 4:5; see also Exodus 6:3, 6:8, 33:1. (All Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard* translation.)

<sup>40</sup> Instead, when God speaks to Moses from the burning bush He refers to Himself in the Qur’ân as “your Lord” (20:12, 28:32), “God, Lord of the Universe” (26:16, 27:8, 28:30) and “God, the Mighty, the Wise One” (27:9)

<sup>41</sup> See the Qur’ân, 19:54-55: “And in the Book you shall tell of Ishmael: he, too, was a man of his word, an apostle, and a prophet. He enjoined prayer and almsgiving on his people, and his Lord was pleased with him.” See also 2:136, 2:140, 3:84, 4:163, 6:84-86.

<sup>42</sup> In the Qur’ân, Moses, not Aaron, possesses the staff and casts it down. See 26:45, as well as 7:117 and 20:69.

<sup>43</sup> Compare Exodus 7:8-8:19 with the Qur’ân, 7:117-126, 20:65-73, 26:41-51.

<sup>44</sup> Exodus 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7, 9:12, 9:34-35, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14:8

<sup>45</sup> Qur’ân, 10:88-89

In the Qur'ân, as a response to Moses' efforts, Pharaoh issues a familiar decree:

We sent forth Moses with Our signs and with clear authority to Pharaoh, Haman, and Korah. But they said: "A sorcerer, a teller of lies."

And when he brought them the Truth from Ourselves, they said: "Put to death the sons of those who share his faith, and spare only their daughters."<sup>46</sup>

In Exodus, however, this decree occurs at the time of Moses' birth, not when he returns to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.<sup>47</sup> Finally, in the famous story of the golden calf, Moses' brother, Aaron, is largely relieved of culpability in the Qur'ân, which says the golden calf was built by the "Samiri" rather than by Aaron.<sup>48</sup>

### Noah

Noah, too, is mentioned in the Qur'ân, and again there are significant differences between the story it tells and the story in Genesis.<sup>49</sup> For example, in the Qur'ân, unlike Genesis, one of Noah's sons refuses to board the ark and is drowned in the flood.<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, the Qur'ân compensates for his loss by rescuing a few "believers"<sup>51</sup> who respond to a warning from Noah (neither the warning nor the rescue of these other believers has any parallel in Genesis):

We sent forth Noah to his people, saying: "Give warning to your people before a woeful scourge overtakes them."

He said: "My people, I come to warn you plainly. Serve God and fear Him, and obey me. He will forgive you your sins and

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<sup>46</sup> This is quoted from the Qur'ân, 40:23-25; similarly, see 7:127. Several other verses in the Qur'ân mention the exodus from Egypt as a deliverance from this edict, implying that the two were contemporaneous events. See, for example: 2:49, 7:141, 14:6. 2:49 is representative of such verses: "Remember how We delivered you from Pharaoh's people, who had oppressed you cruelly, slaying your sons and sparing only your daughters. Surely that was a great trial by your Lord."

<sup>47</sup> Exodus 1:22-2:2:10

<sup>48</sup> Qur'ân, 20:85-97; compare Exodus 32:1-24

<sup>49</sup> See Genesis chapters 6 - 9.

<sup>50</sup> Qur'ân, 11:42-43; compare Genesis 7:1-16

<sup>51</sup> Qur'ân, 11:40 (in Genesis, only Noah, his 3 sons, and their wives enter the ark)

give you respite for an appointed term. When God's time arrives, none shall put it back. Would that you understood this!"

"Lord," said Noah, "night and day I have pleaded with my people, but my pleas have only aggravated their aversion. Each time I call on them to seek Your pardon, they thrust their fingers into their ears and draw their cloaks over their heads, persisting in sin and bearing themselves with insolent pride. I called out loud to them, and appealed to them in public and in private. 'Seek forgiveness of your Lord,' I said. 'He is ever ready to forgive.'" <sup>52</sup>

As for the unbelievers who reject Noah's warning, Noah prays that God would destroy them (this, too, has no parallel in Genesis):

And Noah said: "Lord, do not leave a single unbeliever on the earth. If You spare them, they will mislead Your servants and beget none but sinners and unbelievers. Forgive me, Lord, and forgive my parents and every true believer who seeks refuge in my house. Forgive all the faithful, men and women, and hasten the destruction of the wrongdoers." <sup>53</sup>

The Qur'ân acknowledges that the details it supplies are not part of the traditional story of Noah, but says: "That which We have now revealed to you is secret history: it was unknown to you and to your people." <sup>54</sup> Secret or not, the Qur'ân's story of Noah seems deliberately crafted to parallel many of the early experiences of Muhammad and his followers. Like Muhammad, Noah is accused of inventing his story. <sup>55</sup> Like Muhammad, Noah appears to be a man of no special gifts or importance, and his "followers" are poor and humble. <sup>56</sup> Perhaps most striking, Noah and Muhammad utter virtually identical language about themselves:

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<sup>52</sup> Qur'ân, 71:1-10; Noah's warning is also discussed in 10:71-73 and 11:25-49. In Genesis, the people receive no warning from either God or Noah. See Genesis 6:5 – 7:24.

<sup>53</sup> See the Qur'ân, 71:26-28.

<sup>54</sup> Qur'ân, 11:49

<sup>55</sup> See the Qur'ân, 11:35. The Qur'ân acknowledges that the same was said of Muhammad; see 10:38, 25:4-5, 34:8.

<sup>56</sup> Qur'ân, 11:27; compare to 43:31, which criticizes Muhammad for appearing to be a man of no importance. And see 17:89-93, which criticizes Muhammad for the lack of miracles associated with his message.

[Noah] “I do not say to you that I possess God’s treasures, nor have I knowledge of what is hidden. I do not claim to be an angel, nor do I say to those whom your eyes disdain that God will not be bountiful to them—God knows best what is in their hearts—for then I should become a wrongdoer.”<sup>57</sup>

[Muhammad] “Say: ‘I do not tell you that I possess God’s treasures or know what is hidden, nor do I claim to be an angel. I follow only that which is revealed to me.’

“Say: ‘Are the blind and the seeing equal? Can you not think?’ ”<sup>58</sup>

### **The Covenant**

Finally, the Qur’ân seems to deny the validity of God’s covenant with Abraham’s descendants:

When his Lord put Abraham to the proof by enjoining on him certain commandments and Abraham fulfilled them, He said: “I have appointed you a leader of mankind.”

“And what of my descendants?” asked Abraham.

“My covenant,” said He, “does not apply to the evildoers.”<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, the Old Testament states that this was to be an everlasting covenant through Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants:

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.”<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, God promises various punishments for the Israelites’ wrongdoing, including famine, drought, wild beasts, disease, fear,

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<sup>57</sup> Qur’ân, 11:31

<sup>58</sup> Qur’ân, 6:50

<sup>59</sup> Qur’ân, 2:124

<sup>60</sup> Genesis 17:7; see also: Genesis 17:10, 17:13, 17:19, 17:21; Exodus 2:24, 6:3-5, 34:27; Leviticus 26:9; Deuteronomy 4:23, 4:31, 7:12, 8:18; Judges 2:1;

defeat, poverty, and temporary exile from the land;<sup>61</sup> but after all of that, the covenant would still remain:

“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.”<sup>62</sup>

Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. . . .’ ”<sup>63</sup>

If the Old Testament books are accepted as Scriptural (as the Qur’ân does), then the conflicts between them and the Qur’ân make it difficult to accept the latter as anything more than stories told by a man with a very imperfect knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. When we turn to the New Testament, we find the same difficulties.

Discrepancies With the New Testament. As with the Old Testament, several people from the Gospels are discussed by the Qur’ân—including Jesus, Mary, John the Baptist, and Zecharias, the father of John—and there is some agreement between the two holy books. For example, the Qur’ân agrees with the Gospel story that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived.<sup>64</sup> The Qur’ân attributes miracles to Jesus, such as healing the blind and lepers, bringing the dead back to life, and making a live bird from clay.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the Qur’ân regards Jesus as a prophet,<sup>66</sup> states that He was guided by God,<sup>67</sup> and even refers to Him as the Messiah.<sup>68</sup> But the agreement ends there.

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<sup>61</sup> See Leviticus 26:14-39.

<sup>62</sup> Leviticus 26:44-45

<sup>63</sup> Judges 2:1

<sup>64</sup> See the Qur’ân, 3:47, 19:19-22, 21:91, and 66:12; compare with Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-35.

<sup>65</sup> Qur’ân, 3:49, 5:110; see also, 2:253 (however, making a live bird from clay is not a miracle mentioned in the Gospels)

<sup>66</sup> Qur’ân, 2:136, 4:163, 33:7

<sup>67</sup> Qur’ân, 2:87, 3:48, 5:46, 57:27

<sup>68</sup> Qur’ân, 3:45, 4:157, 5:17, 5:72, 5:75, 9:31

The Qur'ân utterly and emphatically rejects Jesus' divinity and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the Qur'ân asserts that Jesus Himself would reject any claim to divine status:

Then God will say: "Jesus son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: 'Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?'"

"Glory be to You," he will answer, "I could never have claimed what I have no right to."<sup>70</sup>

The Qur'ân also denies the reality of Jesus' crucifixion, maintaining that God lifted Jesus up to heaven and left the illusion of the crucifixion for the Jews to see:

They [the Jews] declared: "We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did.<sup>71</sup>

Those that disagreed about him were in doubt concerning him; they knew nothing about him that was not sheer conjecture; they did not slay him for certain. God lifted him up to Him; God is mighty and wise. There is none among the People of the Book but will believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Resurrection he will bear witness against them.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the Qur'ân takes the bizarre—and apparently contradictory—position of recognizing the authority of the Gospels, and of Jesus' own authority as a prophet, while rejecting the core teachings of Jesus Himself and His disciples: the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, while

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<sup>69</sup> Qur'ân, 4:171, 5:72-73, 5:75, 6:100-102, 9:30-31, 10:68, 17:111, 18:4-5, 19:34-35, 19:88-92, 23:91, 25:2, 39:3-4, 43:81, 72:3

<sup>70</sup> Qur'ân, 5:116

<sup>71</sup> This would be literally translated: "he was made to resemble another for them." See *The Koran*, translated by N. J. Dawood, at p. 76, fn. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Qur'ân, 4:157-159

<sup>73</sup> Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are featured prominently in the Gospels and in the New Testament generally. See, for example: Matthew 27:22-54, 28:5-10, 28:16-20; Mark 15:13-39, 16:4-8, 16:9-20 (not found in some early manuscripts); Luke 23:20-47, 24:1-48; John 19:1-35, 19:41, 20:19-20, 20:24-29, 21:1-2, 21:20-25; Acts 1:1-3, 1:9, 2:14, 2:22-24, 2:32-33, 2:36, 3:12-15, 4:1-3, 4:8-10, 4:33, 5:29-32, 10:38-41, 13:28-31, 17:2-3, 17:18, 17:31, 26:22-23; Romans 1:1-4, 6:3-10, 7:4, 10:9, 14:9; 1 Corinthians 1:13, 1:23, 2:2, 2:8, 9:1-2, 15:3-8, 15:12-20; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14, 5:14-15, 13:4;

denouncing Christianity for proclaiming the “monstrous falsehood” that Jesus is God’s Son,<sup>74</sup> the Qur’ân nevertheless seeks to profit from the celebrity of Christ and Christianity by attributing to Him a prophecy about the coming of Muhammad (the New Testament, of course, contains no such prophecy):

And of Jesus son of Mary, who said to the Israelites, “I am sent forth to you from God to confirm the Torah already revealed, and to give news of an apostle that will come after me whose name is Ahmad [that is, Muhammad].”<sup>75</sup>

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Galatians 1:1, 3:1; Ephesians 1:20-23; Ephesians 2:4-6; Philippians 3:10-11; Colossians 1:18, 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:8; 1 Peter 1:3, 3:21-22; 1 John 1:1-3, Revelation 11:8. In addition, the writings of such early Christians as Ignatius, Polycarp, Aristides, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian demonstrate that Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection were cornerstones of nascent Christianity. You will even find references to the crucifixion in the writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Historian Tacitus and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian Josephus (although the latter appears to have been tampered with).

Similarly, Jesus Himself claimed divine status in a variety of ways:

1. He claimed to have the authority to forgive the sins of people who had not sinned against Him. (Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, 24; 7:47-48)
2. He thought He was perfect. (Matthew 5:17, John 8:29, 17:4)
3. He thought He was eternal. (John 8:58)
4. He centered authority in Himself. In other words, He did not cite authority for His teachings, such as other Scriptures or a revelation from God, but He simply considered His word as sufficient authority for His pronouncements. (Matthew 5:21-22, 5:27-28, 5:31-32, 5:33-34, 5:38-39, 5:43-44, Mark 7:14-15, Luke 6:27)
5. He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, and He claimed a status equal with God. (Matthew 14:33, 16:16-17, 26:63-64, Mark 8:29-30, 14:61-62, Luke 9:20-22, 10:22, 22:70, John 1:49-50, 5:17-18, 5:36-37, 8:18-19, 10:30, 12:45, 14:6-7, 15:23)
6. He taught that a person’s relationship with God depended upon that person’s relationship with Himself. (Matthew 10:32-33, 10:37-40, 11:27-30, 19:29, Mark 8:34-35, 8:38, 9:41, 10:29-30, 13:13, Luke 6:22-23, 7:23, 9:24-26, 12:8-9, 21:16-19, 22:28-30, John 3:14-18, 4:10, 4:14, 5:21-24, 6:27-29, 6:40, 8:12, 8:51, 10:9-10, 10:28, 11:25-26)
7. He thought He had come from Heaven, and spoke about Heaven as if He’d been there. (Matthew 22:29-30, 26:53, Mark 12:25, Luke 14:14, 20:35-36, John 3:13, 8:23, 14:2-3)
8. He thought that His death was necessary to save the world. (Matthew 16:21-23, 20:28, 26:28, Mark 8:31-33, 10:45, 14:24, Luke 22:19-20, John 6:51-54, 10:11, 10:15)
9. He predicted His own death and resurrection. (Matthew 16:21, 17:9, 17:22-23, 20:18-19, 26:2, Mark 8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:32-34, Luke 18:31-33)

<sup>74</sup> Qur’ân, 19:88-92; see also: 4:171, 5:72-73, 9:30-31, 10:68-69, 17:111, 18:4-5, 19:34-35, 23:91, 25:2, 39:3-4, 72:3

<sup>75</sup> See the Qur’ân, 61:6.

This duplicity concerning Christianity can also be seen in various verses which address the fate of Christians. On the one hand, the Qur'ân seems to promise that at least some Christians (and Jews) will be among the saved. For example:

Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right—shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret.<sup>76</sup>

Yet the Qur'ân also contains many verses which promise God's condemnation upon Christians and Jews:

Unbelievers are those that say: “God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.” For the Messiah himself said: “Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord.” He that worships other deities besides God, God will deny him Paradise, and the Fire shall be his home. None shall help the evil-doers.

Unbelievers are those that say: “God is one of three.” There is but one God. If they do not desist from so saying, those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished.<sup>77</sup>

They [the Jews] say: “Our hearts are sealed.” But God has cursed them for their unbelief. They have but little faith.

And now that a Book confirming their own has come to them from God, they deny it, although they know it to be the truth and have long prayed for help against the unbelievers. God's curse be upon the infidels! Evil is that for which they have bartered away their souls. To deny God's own revelation, grudging that He should reveal His bounty to whom He chooses from among His servants! They have incurred God's most inexorable wrath. Ignominious punishment awaits the unbelievers.<sup>78</sup>

The unbelievers among the People of the Book and the pagans shall burn forever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Qur'ân, 2:62; see also: 3:113-3:115, 3:199, 5:69, 28:52-55, 57:27

<sup>77</sup> Qur'ân, 5:72-73

<sup>78</sup> Qur'ân, 2:88-90

<sup>79</sup> Qur'ân, 98:6 (the “People of the Book” are Jews and Christians)

He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will surely be among the losers.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps these seemingly contradictory verses in the Qur'ân regarding Judaism and Christianity can be reconciled, although I do not see how. But this much is undeniable: Islam and Christianity cannot be reconciled with each other. If the Qur'ân is truly God's word, then Christianity is a false religion. And if Christianity is true, then the Qur'ân is, at best, inaccurate, misguided, and man-made.

If the Qur'ân is man-made, rather than from God, then we would expect to find within its pages some of the human foibles of its author (or authors). And we do. For nowhere are those foibles more apparent than in what the Qur'ân says about the fate of its enemies.

Hell. As mentioned at the outset, the Qur'ân speaks often of the mercy and forgiveness of God. Yet there is nothing merciful or forgiving about the Qur'ân's view of Hell. It is a fire which burns and torments the damned,<sup>81</sup> a "prison-house for the unbelievers."<sup>82</sup> The condemned drink scalding water,<sup>83</sup> and eat filth,<sup>84</sup> choking food,<sup>85</sup> and the foul fruit of the Zaqqum tree.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Qur'ân, 3:85; for other examples of verses that speak of the condemnation of Jews and Christians, see: 2:75, 2:83, 2:84-85, 2:88-89, 2:91-96, 2:105, 3:19, 3:21-23, 3:64, 3:79, 3:110-112, 3:187, 4:44, 4:46, 4:51-52, 4:54-56, 4:150-151, 4:153-155, 4:160-161, 4:171, 5:13-14, 5:17, 5:43, 5:59, 5:61-64, 5:72-73, 5:77-82, 9:30-31, 10:68-70, 17:111, 18:4-5, 39:2-4, 57:16, 57:26-27, 59:11, 62:5-7

<sup>81</sup> Qur'ân, 2:81, 2:167, 3:16, 3:181, 3:191-192, 4:14, 4:55-56, 5:72, 6:27, 9:63, 9:68, 11:98, 11:105-106, 11:113, 13:35, 14:30, 18:53, 22:9, 25:11, 31:21, 32:20, 33:64, 34:42, 39:8, 39:16, 39:19, 40:72, 41:19, 41:24, 41:28, 52:13-14, 55:35, 56:94, 57:15, 58:17, 59:3, 64:10, 66:6, 67:5, 67:10-11, 69:31, 70:15, 73:12, 74:29-31, 76:4, 77:31-32, 82:14, 98:6

<sup>82</sup> Qur'ân, 17:8

<sup>83</sup> Qur'ân, 47:15, 56:54, 56:93

<sup>84</sup> Qur'ân, 69:36

<sup>85</sup> Qur'ân, 73:13

<sup>86</sup> Qur'ân, 37:62-66, 44:43-44, 56:52-53; the "Zaqqum tree" is described in 37:62-68:

Is this [Heaven] not a better welcome than the Zaqqum tree? We have made this tree a scourge for the unjust. It grows in the nethermost part of Hell, bearing fruit like devils' heads: on it they shall feed, and with it they shall cram their bellies, together with draughts of scalding water. Then to Hell shall they return.

Surrounded by scorching winds, scalding water, and smoke,<sup>87</sup> they are bound in heavy chains and cry out for death.<sup>88</sup> But they cannot die, for they are condemned to dwell in Hell forever.<sup>89</sup> The Qur'ân often uses very graphic language to describe Hell, such as the following verses:

Hell will lie in ambush, a home for the transgressors. There they shall abide long ages; there they shall taste neither refreshment nor any drink, save scalding water and decaying filth: a fitting recompense. They disbelieved in Our reckoning, and roundly denied Our revelations. But We counted all their doings and wrote them down. We shall say: "Taste this: you shall have nothing but mounting torment!"<sup>90</sup>

The day will surely come when their treasures shall be heated in the fire of Hell, and their foreheads, sides, and backs branded with them. They will be told: "These are the riches which you hoarded. Taste then what you were hoarding."<sup>91</sup>

Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. They shall be lashed with rods of iron. Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: "Taste the torment of the Conflagration."<sup>92</sup>

Practically speaking, the Qur'ân's descriptions of Hell portray God as a sadist who tortures and torments the damned for all eternity—and for no apparent purpose other than His own vengeful amusement. For He could simply destroy them and be done with it, but chooses instead to inflict

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<sup>87</sup> Qur'ân, 56:41-43

<sup>88</sup> Qur'ân, 25:13-14, 34:33, 40:71, 43:77, 69:30-32, 73:12, 76:4

<sup>89</sup> Qur'ân, 2:161-162, 2:167, 4:168-169, 6:122, 9:68, 14:17, 16:85, 18:53, 20:74, 33:65, 35:36-37, 41:28, 43:74-75, 43:77, 82:14-16, 98:6. See also: 2:81, 3:192, 4:14, 4:93, 5:80, 9:63, 16:29, 32:14, 39:72, 40:76, 41:24, 58:17, 64:10. On the other hand, two verses imply that the damned may have a slight hope that God could change His mind. See 6:128: "The Fire shall be your home, and there shall you remain for ever unless God ordain otherwise." Similarly, see 11:107.

<sup>90</sup> Qur'ân, 78:21-30

<sup>91</sup> Qur'ân, 9:35

<sup>92</sup> Qur'ân, 22:19-22

endless pain. I personally consider this to be a slanderous portrait of the Almighty, and it certainly gives the lie to assertions in the Qur'ân that Allah is gentle, loving, merciful, and forgiving.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, these scenes of Hell are exactly what you would expect from the pen (or the mouth) of a passionate, but vengeful, man.

Notice also what a worldly image of Hell the Qur'ân presents. In other words, its images of Hell are little more than the sufferings of this earthly life taken to extremes—the dead eat and drink; they are enchained and imprisoned, beaten and burned. Each scene draws heavily on earthly experience, utterly failing to appreciate that the life of an eternal soul is likely to be very different from our worldly existence. This failure is even more pronounced in the Qur'ân's images of Heaven.

Heaven. The Qur'ân often compares Heaven to gardens,<sup>94</sup> with abundant water.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Heaven is described in the Qur'ân as “gardens watered by running streams.”<sup>96</sup> In the Qur'ân, Heaven contains many mansions and palaces,<sup>97</sup> and the believers are dressed in silks and adorned with gold.<sup>98</sup> They rest on comfortable couches, cushions, and carpets.<sup>99</sup> Food, especially fruit, will abound.<sup>100</sup> There will be rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey for the believers to drink.<sup>101</sup> They will be surrounded by lovely virgins,<sup>102</sup> and will marry spouses who are always faithful.<sup>103</sup> Heaven

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<sup>93</sup> See footnote 6. See also the following verses in the Qur'ân: 2:251, 2:268, 5:54, 52:28, 64:17, 85:14. Of course, the New Testament has also been said to portray God and Hell in similar terms, but I believe falsely so, as I discuss in “WHAT IS HELL REALLY LIKE?”

<sup>94</sup> The Arabic word for Heaven is “Jannah,” which literally means “garden.”

<sup>95</sup> Qur'ân, 5:65, 15:45, 16:31, 18:31, 22:56, 31:8, 37:43, 37:45-46, 39:20, 44:51-52, 55:46, 55:50, 55:62, 55:66, 56:12, 56:31, 56:89, 76:17-18, 77:41, 78:31-32

<sup>96</sup> Qur'ân, 3:15, 3:195, 3:198, 4:13, 4:57, 4:122, 5:85, 9:72, 9:100, 13:35, 16:31, 20:76, 22:14, 22:23, 25:10, 57:12, 58:22, 64:9, 65:11, 66:8, 98:8

<sup>97</sup> Qur'ân, 9:72, 25:10, 39:20, 61:12

<sup>98</sup> Qur'ân, 18:31, 22:23, 44:53, 76:12, 76:21

<sup>99</sup> Qur'ân, 18:31, 36:56, 55:54, 55:76, 76:13

<sup>100</sup> Qur'ân, 13:35, 36:57, 37:42, 38:51, 44:55, 47:15, 55:52, 55:54, 55:68, 56:20-21, 56:32, 69:23, 76:14, 77:42-43

<sup>101</sup> Qur'ân, 47:15; see also, 76:17, 76:21

<sup>102</sup> Qur'ân, 37:48-49, 38:52, 55:56, 55:70-74, 56:22, 56:36-38

<sup>103</sup> Qur'ân, 3:15, 4:57, 44:54; another verse may indicate that those who were married in their earthly life will be reunited with their spouses: “Together with their spouses, they shall recline in shady groves upon soft couches.” (36:56) However, this verse could also refer to spouses obtained in heaven.

in the Qur'ân is a place of peace<sup>104</sup> and eternal bliss,<sup>105</sup> where the believers “have all that they desire.”<sup>106</sup>

As inviting as this portrait of Heaven may be, it seems curiously man-made. The Qur'ân's emphasis on sensual pleasures is striking: eating, drinking, enjoying fine clothes and comfortable furniture—even, it appears, engaging in sexual relations. When viewed as a man-made construct, this makes perfect sense. Rich gardens and abundant food and water would indeed be Heaven to a person who lived in the largely desert climate of Arabia, as did Muhammad and his early followers. But when viewed as a divine revelation, the Qur'ân's images seem strangely incongruent with the eternal nature of the afterlife, for why would an eternal soul need food, drink, or sexual pleasure.<sup>107</sup> Are there no heavenly joys that can surpass these earthly delights?

Then again, what is perhaps even more striking is the Qur'ân's failure to discuss the relationship and interaction of the saved with the Almighty. The Qur'ân says that men in Heaven “will put questions to each other,”<sup>108</sup> but does not say that they will even converse with God. He seemingly rewards the faithful with everything they could want, and then disappears from the scene, like the Genie in the magic lamp.

Is Islam a Religion of Peace or Violence? One of the great proofs of the truth of Christianity for me is that so many of Jesus' teachings are counter-intuitive—they don't sound like something a mere man would come up with on his own, because they run counter to the way most men think. For example, His followers must have been astonished when Jesus said to them:

“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love

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<sup>104</sup> Qur'ân, 39:73, 44:51, 56:25-26, 56:91

<sup>105</sup> Qur'ân, 11:108, 39:73-74, 43:71, 82:13, 83:22-24

<sup>106</sup> Qur'ân, 16:31, 25:16, 36:57, 41:31, 43:71

<sup>107</sup> Compare Matthew 22:30, where Jesus says: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Similar: Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:34-35.

<sup>108</sup> Qur'ân, 37:50

your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”<sup>109</sup>

We must place in the same category such teachings as:

Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.<sup>110</sup>

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”<sup>111</sup>

“But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”<sup>112</sup>

And of course we also have the most counter-intuitive pronouncement of all:

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”<sup>113</sup>

You will find few, if any, such counter-intuitive notions in the Qur’ân. It reads like men think: love your friends (Muslims) and hate your enemies (everyone else). And as the Qur’ân’s depictions of Heaven and Hell illustrate, Allah seems to think the same way. Indeed, a debate is raging within the Muslim community these days as to whether Islam should be a religion of peace or violence. Those Muslims who oppose the use of violence (such as

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<sup>109</sup> Luke 6:31-36; see also See Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27

<sup>110</sup> Luke 6:29; see also Matthew 5:39

<sup>111</sup> Matt 18:21-22; see also Luke 17:3-4

<sup>112</sup> Matthew 23:11-12; see also: Matthew 18:4, Luke 14:11, 18:14

<sup>113</sup> Luke 23:33-34

terrorism) point to this famous verse from the Qur'ân to support their claim that Islam opposes violence, especially against the innocent:

That was why We laid it down for the Israelites that whoever killed a human being, except as punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind. <sup>114</sup>

Similarly, another famous verse from the Qur'ân seems to prohibit war, except in self-defense:

Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love aggressors. <sup>115</sup>

Yet this is not a one-sided argument, <sup>116</sup> for the Muslims on the other side can quote many verses from the Qur'ân in support of violence and hatred against non-Muslims. <sup>117</sup> Here is a sampling:

When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. <sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Qur'ân, 5:32

<sup>115</sup> Qur'ân, 2:190

<sup>116</sup> The critic will no doubt point out that Christianity has had more than its share of violence and hatred in its history, including the Crusades, the excesses of the Inquisition, and the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Yet such incidents are thankfully rare nowadays, due in large part, I believe, to the printing press and high literacy rates, which enabled Christians to read for themselves the clear and consistent message of the New Testament in opposition to violence, revenge, and hatred. Unlike Christianity, I do not believe Muslim violence can be solely attributed to ignorance, because, as I explain herein, the Qur'ân presents a decidedly mixed message on this subject. Indeed, many of today's Muslim terrorist leaders are well educated, knowledgeable, and sophisticated, and they can find ample support for their views within the pages of the Qur'ân.

<sup>117</sup> The Qur'ân explicitly prohibits Muslims from fighting each other, except in the case of open aggression by one Muslim nation or group against another. See, for example, 49:10: "The believers are a band of brothers. Make peace among your brothers and fear God, so that you may be shown mercy." See also, 49:9.

<sup>118</sup> Qur'ân, 9:5

Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous.<sup>119</sup>

You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him. They said to their people: “We disown you and the idols which you worship besides God. We renounce you: enmity and hate shall reign between us until you believe in God only.” (But do not emulate the words of Abraham to his father: “I shall implore forgiveness for you, although I can in no way protect you from God.”)<sup>120</sup>

Indeed, the Qur’ân mandates that able-bodied male Muslims participate in war.<sup>121</sup> Those who fulfill this obligation—especially those who die in battle—receive God’s favor, mercy, and eternal rewards,<sup>122</sup> while those who shirk it risk being cast into Hell with the unbelievers.<sup>123</sup>

Conclusion. I have no use for any religion which is not true. And while I recognize that everyone must decide for themselves whether a particular religion is true or false, I believe Islam stands or falls on the basis of its holy book, the Qur’ân.<sup>124</sup> That book claims to be a perfect book,

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<sup>119</sup> Qur’ân, 9:123. Other verses which counsel Muslims to fight or make war upon unbelievers include: 2:191, 2:193, 4:76, 4:104, 9:29, 9:73, 47:34-35, 48:29, 66:9. Three of these verses—9:73, 48:29, and 66:9—are specifically addressed to Muhammad, and many Muslims argue that all such verses should be limited to that time period, when Muslims were being persecuted and attacked. However, most of these verses are not explicitly so limited. In addition, many verses forbid friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians: 3:28, 3:118, 4:138-139, 4:144, 5:51, 5:57, 5:80-81, 6:159, 9:23, 58:14-15, 58:22, 60:13.

<sup>120</sup> Qur’ân, 60:4

<sup>121</sup> Qur’ân, 2:216, 3:167-168, 4:77, 4:84, 9:12-14, 9:111, 47:20-21

<sup>122</sup> Qur’ân, 2:218, 3:146, 3:157-158, 3:169-174, 3:195, 4:74, 4:95-96, 4:100, 8:74-75, 9:19-22, 9:41, 16:110-111, 47:4-6, 57:10, 61:4

<sup>123</sup> Qur’ân, 8:15-16, 9:38-39, 9:44-45, 9:49-56, 9:81-87, 9:93-95, 33:18-19, 48:11-12, 48:16-17, 49:15

<sup>124</sup> I am aware of the “Hadith”—the traditions about Muhammad and his early followers, which were collected during the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1058), more than 100 years after Muhammad’s death. These traditions are often cited by moderate Muslims in an effort to soften the interpretation of some verses in the Qur’ân. For example, 4:34 tells Muslim husbands to deal with disobedient wives by first admonishing them, then terminating sexual relations with them, and finally by beating them. A tradition says that when a Muslim asked Muhammad what the husband should use to beat his wife, Muhammad showed him a tooth brush. (See *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Understanding Islam*, p.

without flaws or contradictions.<sup>125</sup> Yet it appears to be the product of a devout, monotheistic man (or men) who made a lot of mistakes in writing or dictating it.

How else are we to explain the many contradictions between the Qur'ân and the Old Testament? Does the Muslim explanation—that the Jews got it wrong—hold water? The story of Joseph alone is enough to refute this explanation, when viewed with common sense rather than zeal. The story of Joseph in the Old Testament reads like real life, with elements of jealousy, lust, lies, and injustice. The story as presented in the Qur'ân simply does not make sense. Similarly, the Qur'ân's credibility is seriously undermined by its flawed renderings of the stories about Noah and Moses, and its apparent bias against God's covenant with the Israelites.

And what are we to think of a book that accepts the virgin birth of Christ, acknowledges His miracles, recognizes Him as a prophet of God, and endorses the divine authority of the Gospels—and then denies the most important things those Scriptures say about Him?

The descriptions of Heaven and Hell also convince me that the Qur'ân is the product of a human mind. Their focus is almost entirely on sensual pleasures and pain—as if Heaven and Hell are no more than extensions of our earthly existence. In the Qur'ân, Allah seems to be absent from Heaven, perhaps because He spends all of His time sadistically torturing people in Hell. I cannot accept this cruel, cold-hearted portrait of God as truth. The images of Heaven and Hell in the Qur'ân could only have come from the mind of man—probably the same man who endorsed hatred and war against the “enemies” of Islam.

There is much in Islam to commend it. I admire its emphasis on devotion to God, prayer, and charity. There is no doubt that Islam furthered the cause of monotheism and improved the condition of women and children in Muhammad's Arabia. The unity and brotherhood of Muslims around the world has much to teach ecumenical Christianity. Yet I could never choose a religion based on its social desirability—it also has to be true. And any attempt to prove Islam to be true is doomed to failure because of one insurmountable obstacle: the Qur'ân. It is truly the problem with Islam.

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260.) Nevertheless, my understanding is that Muslims do not regard the Hadith as authoritative on a level with the Qur'ân.

<sup>125</sup> See footnote 7, above.

## APPENDIX: A BRIEF HISTORY OF EARLY ISLAM

The founder of Islam was Muhammad, who was born in Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia, in about 569 A.D. Orphaned by the age of six, he was primarily raised by his uncle, Abu Talib. Muhammad often traveled with passing caravans, and by the age of 25 became a caravan leader for a middle-aged widow, Khadija, who would soon thereafter become his wife. The caravans exposed Muhammad to the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and monotheistic Arabs.

In the year 610 A.D., at about the age of 40, Muhammad went to a mountain near Mecca to devote himself to prayer. While there, he is said to have had a vision of the angel Gabriel, who told him that he was to be the messenger of Allah. With the support of his family, Muhammad began to proclaim the message that there is only one God—Allah. After the deaths of his wife and uncle in 619 A.D., and meeting stiff resistance to his preaching in Mecca, Muhammad moved his family and followers to the city of Yathrib in 622 A.D., where he found a population much more receptive to his message. He became known there as “The Prophet,” and the city was renamed *Medinat al-Nabi*, “City of the Prophet”—or Medina, for short. Muhammad became the city’s religious leader, but he also ruled the city as its political leader. In a succession of wars with Mecca from 624 to 630 A.D., Muhammad not only successfully defended his new religious stronghold, but triumphed by capturing Mecca itself. Before long, he unified the entire Arabian peninsula under his rule.

Muhammad claimed to continue to have visions and revelations from God throughout the remainder of his life. These were memorized by some of his followers, and were later written down and organized after his death, resulting in the *Qur’ân*. Many of these revelations helped instill morality, defeat idolatry, and end harmful superstitions.

Muhammad never tried to hide the fact that he was a mere man. He readily admitted his mistakes and ignorance. He made no claims of deity for himself, and did not attempt to perform miracles or to foretell the future. Indeed, he remained humble despite his rise in power, living simply and accumulating no wealth. To all but his enemies, he was kind and merciful. He gave generously of his time and money to those in need, and he judged both wisely and with incorruptible justice. He appointed honest judges and efficient, trustworthy administrators. Perhaps the greatest tribute that can be paid to the man was the single-minded devotion shown by all who knew him.

At the age of 59, Muhammad began to experience fevers, which gradually grew more frequent and more debilitating. At age 63 he experienced

a fever which lasted two weeks and confined him to bed. A few days later, on June 7th or 8th, 632, he died.

Muhammad named no political successor, which led to an immediate dispute about who should rule after his death. The struggle was primarily between Ali, a son-in-law of Muhammad, and Abu Bekr, a father-in-law of the Prophet. The hostility between the two camps led to the division in Islam between the Shi'ites (followers of Ali) and the Sunnis (followers of Abu Bekr). Abu Bekr would emerge triumphant, as the first of the four “rightly-guided caliphs.”<sup>126</sup>

Although his rule lasted only two years (632-634 A.D.), Abu Bekr was an able leader. He avoided any hint of corruption in his administration. He required his military leaders to wage war humanely, by protecting non-combatants and avoiding unnecessary killing and destruction. Perhaps most importantly, he insisted on the equality of all Muslims—which proved to be tremendously helpful in converting people to the new religion. Thanks to Abu Bekr's enlightened rule, and the brilliance of his leading general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, the Arabs defeated both the Persians and the Byzantines, and carried Islam into Syria.

Before Abu Bekr died, he named as his successor another father-in-law of the Prophet, Umar Abu Hafsa ibn al-Khattab (Omar or Umar, for short). Omar continued many of the practices of his predecessor which had proved so beneficial. He also enjoyed tremendous military successes, as his armies conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iran (which then was Persia), and Iraq. Omar granted Jews and Christians religious toleration and the same legal protections enjoyed by Muslims, but he also required that all non-Muslims leave the Arabian peninsula. Omar was murdered in 644 A.D., and a six-man committee chose his successor, Othman ibn Affan, another son-in-law of Muhammad and a member of the Meccan aristocracy (the Umayyads).

Othman ruled for about 12 years. His caliphate was marked by widespread corruption, but also by further expansion of the growing Arab Empire into Afghanistan, Asia Minor, and the southern Caucasus. In 656 A.D., Othman, like Omar, was assassinated. His successor was the one man Muslim leaders believed could unify Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims: Ali. But it was not to be. Ali's attempts to reverse the corruption of Othman's government, as well as his failure to capture and punish the assassins of

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<sup>126</sup> The term, “caliph,” is derived from the title Abu Bekr took for himself, *Khalifat al-Rasul al-Allah*, meaning “Representative of the Messenger of God.” The four rightly-guided caliphs were Abu Bekr, Omar, Othman, and Ali.

Othman, angered many, and he found himself faced with multiple rebellions before finally being assassinated in 661 A.D.

Power was now seized by the amir of Syria, Mu'awiya, the first of the Umayyad Caliphate, which would rule the Arab Empire until 750 A.D. Mu'awiya was an exceptional administrator, who used many Jews and Christians in his government. He also turned the caliphate into a hereditary monarchy so that his son, Yezid, could succeed him—which he did in 680 A.D. Under the Umayyads, the Empire expanded into northern Afghanistan, central Asia, Pakistan, North Africa, and Spain. Only Charles Martel's victory at the Battle of Tours (732 A.D.) stopped this Muslim expansion from taking over all of France, and possibly all of Europe. Islam has since been carried into other parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, and even the Americas—often by conquest, but also through Muslim merchants, immigrants, and missionaries.

Since the Qur'ân requires that conversion to Islam be voluntary,<sup>127</sup> forced conversion to Islam has been exceptionally rare in Muslim history—and also unnecessary. The relatively enlightened rule of the Arabs and their successors, as well as the Muslim ideal of equality and brotherhood among believers, attracted many to the new religion. So did the routine imposition of disabilities (such as higher taxes and exclusion from government service) upon non-Muslims in Muslim-controlled lands. In addition, economic incentives were sometimes offered to encourage conversion to Islam,<sup>128</sup> and a few were convinced by the occasional persecution of non-Muslims. For these and other reasons, people in areas which came under Muslim control usually converted to Islam within a few generations. That is why Christians are now a minority in such former strongholds as Turkey (Asia Minor), Palestine, and Egypt.

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<sup>127</sup> See the Qur'ân, 2:256: "There shall be no compulsion in religion." And see 50:45: "We well know what they [unbelievers] say. You shall not use coercion with them. Admonish with the Koran whoever fears My warning."

<sup>128</sup> For example, in 744 A.D., Christians in Egypt were offered a temporary tax exemption if they would convert to Islam; 24,000 accepted.

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