



## **487612 - The claim that the Quran was plagiarized from the scriptures of the People of the Book**

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### **the question**

How do we respond to those Christians who claim that the Quran was plagiarized from the Bible due to the similarities between both religions such as the concept of Paradise and Hellfire, Day of Judgement, common Prophets such as Noah, Moses, Jesus, Adam, etc, and other similarities between the two books.

I am asking because this is a very common argument that Christian apologists make when asked why they can't accept Islam. They ask that why should they believe in a book that came 200 years after their Bible and "plagiarized" certain concepts from it. Now I am already able to understand there is many problems with the argument they are making but can you help me with a comprehensive answer that refutes their version of the Bible and proves the Quran.

Thank You and May Allah Bless us all.

### **Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The claim that the Quran was plagiarized from the Scriptures of the People of the Book is an ancient and recurrent specious argument that is aimed at a single conclusion: knowing that the similarity between the Holy Quran and the Bible, if it is not explained that it is because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) took it from the scriptures of the People of the Book - directly or through an intermediary - then there is no other conclusion than to accept that the source of this similarity is the fact that they both came from a divine source.



But if there is no way that the people can accept the divine origin of the Quran, then there remains no other option except to strive hard to propagate this claim and spread it among people, telling them that the Quran was plagiarized from the scriptures that came before it.

The aim behind that is to disprove the divine origin of the Quran and to fabricate the lie that it was of human origin.

Secondly:

The discussion of how the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) could have learned the stories of the People of the Book, then transmitted them in the Quran - meaning that it was not revelation - is a discussion of various scenarios in which he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) could have learned the stories directly from their holy books, or learned what the scriptures contained of stories, commands and prohibitions, verbally from the People of the Book, if it was not possible for him to study their books himself.

This specious argument is based on a number of claims, which are strongly connected to it. If these claims are proven to be baseless, then the conclusions drawn from them will also be proven to be baseless, and this specious argument will lose its foundation and can no longer be valid.

These claims may be summed up in three basic claims:

1. The claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was not unlettered or illiterate.
2. The claim that the Christian scriptures were available to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he could quote from them or copy them.
3. The claim that Makkah was a major educational centre for scriptural studies.

We will address these three claims briefly and prove them to be unfounded, by Allah's leave.

Thirdly:



The illiteracy of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him):

One of the ways of learning about the stories of the People of the Book is learning them directly from their scriptures. This is only possible for one who had the means to learn, and the means to learn have to do either with the learner or the material from which he wants to learn.

With regard to the one who wants to learn, we must address the claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was not unlettered or illiterate.

With regard to the material from which the learner wants to learn, we must address the claim that Arabic translations were available before the Prophet's mission began.

The idea that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was unlettered or illiterate undermines the claim that the Quran was plagiarized from the scriptures of the People of the Book. Therefore there is no way that they could prove this claim, unless they prove that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was not unlettered.

Those who hold this view followed an unfair method to prove that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was not unlettered. They sought out weak reports or ambiguous statements, or they based their arguments on far-fetched interpretations of some texts, and they ignored the clear, unambiguous texts.

The reason for interpreting the texts in this manner is the desire to reach the conclusion they wanted by accusing the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) of plagiarism and denying the divine origin of the Holy Quran.

The text of the Quran and Sunnah in many places clearly indicate, leaving no room for doubt, that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was indeed unlettered and that he never narrated any of the stories of the People of the Book before the revelation came to him, and he never wrote anything with his own hand. He knew nothing of the stories before his mission began, and he never spoke of them before that.

These texts formed an insurmountable obstacle for the Orientalists and missionaries, and the way



in which they dealt with them was one of two ways: either they rejected the many religious texts which affirmed that he was unlettered, and regarded them as an Islamic fabrication with no basis in historical reality, or they accepted these texts in general, but interpreted them in a manner that is not indicated by the linguistic meaning of the words and the context of the Quran and hadiths.

Both methods of dealing with the text are flawed; the methodology is flimsy and shows clear bias.

To discuss their argument in detail is something that cannot be done in this brief answer. There are books written specifically to address this specious argument and refute it in detail.

But because of the importance of this topic – which is affirming that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was unlettered – we will mention some of the evidence from the Holy Quran and corroborating reports from the Prophet's Sunnah, which prove with certainty that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) could neither read nor write.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{You were not able to read any book before this [Quran], nor were you able to write anything with your right hand. In that case the followers of falsehood would indeed have had cause to doubt}[al-'Ankabut 29:48].

This unambiguous verse clearly states that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not study the scriptures of the People of the Book. It also clearly states that he did not copy anything from them. In other words, this verse affirms that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had no knowledge of the scriptures of the People of the Book.

This is a clear and direct refutation of the claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had knowledge of the scriptures of the People of the book and had studied them in depth.

Other verses highlight the fact that the people of Makkah knew that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had no knowledge of the scriptures of the People of the Book, such as the verses in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):



{Likewise We have revealed to you [O Muhammad] a life-giving message by Our command. You knew nothing of the scripture or matters of faith}[ash-Shura 42:54]

{Say: If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I spent a whole lifetime among you before it came to me; will you not then understand?}[Yunus 10:160].

Regarding evidence from the Prophet's biography (sirah), which proves that he was indeed unlettered, there is a great deal of such evidence, including the following:

-1-

It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), that he said: "We are an unlettered community, we do not write or calculate. The month is like this and like this," meaning that one time it is twenty-nine and one time it is thirty. Narrated by al-Bukhari (1814) and Muslim (1080).

This hadith clearly highlights that what is meant by being unlettered here, which leaves no room for confusion or misinterpretation, is not being able to write and not being able to calculate.

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The books of the Prophet's biography (sirah) and history make no mention of the Prophet writing down the revelation, or of him writing his letters to the kings himself. Rather the opposite is what is mentioned; the Prophet (blessings of peace and Allah be upon him) had scribes who wrote down the revelation and other things.

In a brilliant text of Ibn Khaldun, there is a description of the level of education in the Arabian Peninsula just before the Prophet's mission began. He says: "Among the Arabs, the skill of writing was rarer than she-camels' eggs. Most of the people were illiterate, especially the desert-dwellers, because this is a skill that is usually found among city-dwellers.

Hence the Arabs did not refer to the illiterate person as being illiterate; rather they would describe



one who knew how to read and write as being knowledgeable, because knowing how to read and write was the exception, not the norm among people. As the religious texts and books of Islamic history did not describe Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) as one who knew how to read and write [which would be something remarkable at that time, so the sources would have mentioned it], it is sufficient for the researcher to bear in mind what was the norm at that time, which is that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not know how to read or write.

After noting the above, it is worth pointing out what Dr. 'Abd ar-Rahman Badawi said in his book *Difa' 'an al-Quran dida Muntaqidihi*:

“In order to assume that their claim is valid, it must be assumed that Muhammad knew Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and that he must have had a huge library, containing all the texts of the Talmud and true Gospels, along with some of the works of the Greek Church Fathers [early Christian theologians] and the books of various churches and Christian denominations.

In the light of this quotation, it becomes clear that the claim of plagiarism on the part of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) not only requires proof that he was not unlettered, but also requires proof that he had access to a huge library!

If they failed to prove that he was not unlettered, then how could they prove that he had access to such a huge library? This is something that is utterly impossible.

You should realize that access to such a store of knowledge was not possible for any of the People of the Book themselves at that time, so how about a man of Quraysh?”

Fourthly:

Refuting the claim that Arabic translations of the scriptures of the People of the Book were available before the Prophet's mission began:

Research regarding this matter should be based on different historical resources, far removed from wishful thinking or historical bias. This research should be based on examining the issue from



proper historical resources.

Here we may examine testimony from the most authentic historical sources, namely the Quran and Sunnah - which are the two most reliable resources for studying the biography of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) - as well as the arguments of some Western academics and the statements of non-Muslims, whom no one could accuse of being sympathetic towards Islam. This is the strongest proof against the missionaries and Orientalists, and is more shocking to them than being struck with arrows.

The testimony of the Holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah:

The one who studies the life of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) will see that there is no evidence, indication or suggestion that any Arabic translation of the Bible existed at that time. Rather, from studying the Quran and Sunnah, he may understand the opposite of that, namely that there was no Arabic translation available.

Al-Bukhari narrated in his *Sahih* (4458) from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: The people of the Torah used to read the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic to the Muslims.

Therefore the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Do not believe the People of the Book and do not disbelieve them. Rather say: We believe in Allah and what He sent down to us."

This hadith indicates that the Jews had a full monopoly on the text and its explanation. If their texts were known in Arabic, there would have been no need for the Jews to read the text or explain it [to the Muslims].

This idea is supported by the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{There are some among them who distort the Book with their tongues, so that you would think it is part of the Book, but it is not part of the Book; and they say: This is from Allah, but it is not from



Allah. And they tell lies about Allah knowingly}[Al 'Imran 3:78].

When the Jews used to distort the Book with their tongues, when reading some religious stories, to give the impression that what they were saying was a transmission of what was in their books, the Muslims were unable to check those books in order to find out whether what they were saying was true or not, because the books were not available in Arabic. Hence the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told the Muslims not to ask the People of the Book about anything. This indicates that the People of the Book had a monopoly on knowledge of their Book. Al-Bukhari gave a chapter [in his *Sahih*] the heading of: The Prophet's saying: "Do not ask the People of the Book [about anything]."

Perhaps one of the clearest proofs is the fact that the polytheist Arabs did not refer to this hypothetical translated text when they wanted to deny his prophethood. They had no argument, so they claimed that a young non-Arab man was the one who was teaching the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). If this translated text had been available, they would have said: You read this text, or it was read to you.

The Quran mentions their accusation and rejects their accusation of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{We know full well that they say: It is but a man who teaches him. But the one to whom they point speaks a foreign tongue, whereas this is clear Arabic speech}[an-Nahl 16:103].

The testimony of Western academics:

We will not discuss the statements of academics on this topic in detail. Rather it is sufficient in this regard to mention the conclusions reached through academic research.

Perhaps the most important book written on this topic is the book of Bruce Metzger, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, *The Bible in Translation*, in which he said:

"It is most likely that the oldest Arabic translation of the Bible dates back to the eighth century."





The Orientalist Thomas Patrick Hughes wrote: “There is no proof that Muhammad had read the Christian Scriptures... It must be noted that there is no clear evidence to suggest that any Arabic translation of the Old and New Testaments existed prior to the time of Muhammad.”

Albert Estero said: “Arabic translations of the Bible may have appeared towards the end of Umayyad rule, at the beginning of the eighth century [CE].”

Greve concluded that “All that one can say about the possibility of there having been an Arabic translation of the Gospel before the emergence of Islam is that there is no definite sign to confirm that.”

To sum up, we may note what was quoted by William Henry Bannock, which is like a consensus among the critics, “The view that the Arabic translation of the New Testament only appeared after the emergence of Islam is the view of most of the mid-nineteenth-century critics.”

Fifthly:

The claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) plagiarized the Quran through an intermediary:

After proving wrong the idea that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was not illiterate, and confirming that there was no Arabic translation of the Bible at his time, it is established that there is no way that he could have found out what was in the scriptures of the People of the Book directly by reading them himself.

After that, our opponents have only one option, which is to assume that Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) learned about the knowledge of the People of the Book from someone else.

The idea that the Prophet acquired the revelation from people is an old idea. The polytheists accused him of that, and the Quran refuted them, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):



{And they say: Tales of the ancients that he has written down; they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.

Say: It [the Quran] has been sent down by Him Who knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth. Verily, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful}[al-Furqan 25:5-6].

All that our opponents can do in this regard is to suggest some possibilities and mere assumptions, which are no more than false speculation at best, and are based on weird historical stories that cannot stand up to examination, or some reports with very weak chains of narration.

Based on that, we will examine these assumptions in the light of the Prophet's biography, the extent of knowledge of some subtle scientific issues that are mentioned in the text that he brought, and the methodology of the hadith scholars in assessing and accepting reports.

The Orientalists and their lackeys among the missionaries mentioned the possibility that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) acquired knowledge from others. It is sufficient for us here to discuss the strongest of these possibilities, and to prove that it is flawed.

The idea that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) could have acquired the knowledge of the People of the Book before his mission began is one of the most well-known aspersions that the missionaries and Orientalists cast on him and propagated.

Sometimes they claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had a teacher whom he visited frequently in order to learn the knowledge of the People of the Book. They may even quote hypothetical meetings with some scholars of the People of the Book to support this claim.

This is an assumption that they make, which needs to be answered in several ways through a critical examination of its origins, including the following:

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The claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had a teacher before his



mission began, from whom he learned the knowledge of the People of the Book, necessarily means that he met with that teacher repeatedly over a lengthy period. But the life of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was different from the life of anyone else, for his life at every stage was documented in great detail, which means that his spending a great deal of time in acquiring the knowledge of the People of the Book for the length of time needed to acquire the huge amount of knowledge that he brought to people is an idea that must be rejected out of hand. If his people had been aware of that, they would have mentioned the time and place of this lengthy period of learning, and where the meetings supposedly took place.

-2-

Even if we assume for the sake of argument that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) ever met with Jewish and Christian scholars before his mission began, such meetings would not have allowed him to acquire all this vast and precise knowledge, because he did not meet anyone before his mission began – as is stated in the books of his biography – apart from the monk Bahirah, in a very brief meeting, if the report can be proven, and Waraqah ibn Nawfal.

- As for the Prophet's supposed meeting with the monk Bahirah, it happened when he was twelve years old. From a historical point of view, this story is odd, as was mentioned by adh-Dhahabi and other scholars.

Moreover, even if we assume that this story is proven, it does not lead to the conclusion that the missionaries intended, because this meeting was so brief that it would not be possible for a person to learn anything in such a short time, let alone acquire great, important and weighty information like the revelation that he brought later on.

- As for the Prophet's meeting with Waraqah ibn Nawfal, it does not make sense – from a rational point of view – to quote it as evidence that Waraqah was a teacher of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) only met Waraqah after the first verses of the Quran were revealed. Moreover, Waraqah himself affirmed the prophethood of the Prophet (blessings and peace of



Allah be upon him) and wished to live long enough to lend great support to him. But Waraqah died shortly after that.

This is all that happened when they met.

In fact, the claim that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) acquired knowledge from the People of the Book when he was in Makkah is a claim that is disproven by the academic and cultural status of Makkah and the true nature of the connection this Arab society had with the knowledge of the People of the Book.

Christianity had become deeply immersed in idolatry and misguidance, and its followers had become arrogant, as they were described by Isaac Taylor.

Bell said: "There is no strong proof to suggest that Christianity had any centre in the Hijaz, or near Makkah, or even in Madinah, and [people in Arabia] knew very little about the knowledge of the People of the Book. How could such little knowledge enable the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to acquire such vast and precise knowledge of the stories of the People of the Book?"

Sixthly:

After proving that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not learn the knowledge of the People of the Book from them directly or through an intermediary, we have no option left except to affirm that it was revelation from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, to His chosen Prophet.

The Quran establishes proof of its divine origin by telling stories of the Prophets and past nations that it mentions:

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{You were not there on the western side [of the mountain] when We decreed for Musa the commission, nor did you witness that event.



But We brought forth many nations [after Musa], and a long time has gone by since then. And you [O Muhammad] did not dwell among the people of Madyan, learning from them [the story mentioned in] Our revelation; rather it is We Who have sent you as a Messenger [and revealed to you their stories]}[al-Qasas 28:44-45]

{This is an account of the unseen [the distant past], which We reveal to you [O Muhammad]; neither you nor your people had any knowledge of it before this. So be patient, for the best outcome is for those who fear Allah}[Hud 11:49]

{This is an account of the unseen [the distant past], which We reveal to you [O Muhammad]; you were not with them when they cast lots with their pens, [to decide] who, from among them, should be the guardian of Maryam. Nor were you with them when they disputed about it}[Al 'Imran 3:44].

Such verses affirm the prophethood of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and affirm that these stories are revelation from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted.

Imam Abu Ja'far an-Nahhas says: "Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, stated that as proof of his prophethood for Quraysh, because he did not know how to write and he did not mix with the People of the Book, and there were no People of the Book in Makkah, but he brought them stories of the previous prophets and nations." End quote from *I'rab al-Quran* (3/76).

Thus we see that when the stubborn people rejected the prophethood of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and rejected the divine origin of the Quran, they failed to explain where the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) learned the stories and knowledge of the People of the Book. Hence they resorted to fabrications in an attempt to conceal the light of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, so that it would not reach the eyes of seekers.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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