

APOCRYPHAL ELEMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND QUR'ĀN

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PRECIS

This essay explores how both the Qur'ān and the New Testament make use of apocryphal (noncanonical) or aggadic sources in their presentations of characters known from the Hebrew Bible and how scholars of each tradition, in accordance with their own theologies of revelation and prophecy, have explained this phenomenon. For Christians, both in the patristic period and in the modern world, the main issue has been relating the apocryphal elements to the canonical Old Testament and finding various explanations for the presence of non-Old Testament material. For Muslims, who accept prophetic revelation prior to the Prophet Muhammad but do not recognize the canonicity of any previous Scriptures as preserved, the issue has generally involved explaining why other “biblical” traditions (canonical or otherwise) differ from the Qur'ān. In addressing this issue, certain arguments were held in common between Muslims and Christians, but a major difference in approach can be seen to derive from the different relationship each group has to the Hebrew Bible. Both Christian and Muslim scholars in the modern world have shown greater willingness than their classical counterparts to recognize apocryphal sources for their sacred texts and to offer more nuanced theological explanations for how their sacred texts relate to these sources.

From the title of this essay, which includes the phrase “apocryphal elements,” it is clear that the starting point for this discussion is Christian scholarship on the Bible and the Qur'ān. Specifically, the point of departure will be the charge leveled by Christian scholars against the Qur'ān that its presentations of “biblical” characters are flawed because they contain “apocryphal” or “aggadic” elements.¹ My aims will be (1) to show how this charge parallels concerns raised

¹The term “apocryphal” will be used broadly for traditions known from Jewish religious texts from the second temple period that were not included within the canon of rabbinic Judaism (i.e., the

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by biblical scholars about the New Testament's appropriation of Hebrew Bible characters,² and (2) to explore the similarities and differences between how Muslims and Christians have addressed this subject from within their respective faith traditions.

Searching for Sources in the Qur'ān

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when historical-critical methods were being applied with ever-increasing rigor to biblical texts, some Christian scholars noticed post- or extra-biblical elements in the Qur'ānic accounts of figures known from the Bible, and they often took these apocryphal elements as evidence that the Qur'ān relied on faulty information or else misunderstood its sources. Thus, Carl Brockelmann stated that Muhammad's "acquaintanceship with biblical material was, to be sure, extremely superficial and rich with errors," as "[h]e may have owed some of its characteristics to the Jewish legends of the Haggadah"³ and also to "Christian teachers who . . . acquainted him with the Gospel of the Infancy, the Legend of the Seven Sleepers, the saga of Alexander, and the other recurrent themes of medieval world literature."⁴ On a similar note, Richard Bell described a slow process whereby Muhammad became acquainted with biblical materials, such that Muhammad first heard stories that were Bible-related from some imperfect source, perhaps a Christian slave in Mecca. These stories came to him piecemeal, and he did not know how they fit together, nor did he realize that the apocryphal materials were different from the biblical. Later, according to Bell, Muhammad stopped getting his information only third- or fourth-hand—although his knowledge was still imperfect and garbled—and it was disconcerting to him to realize how different the Bible was from what he had thought.⁵ W. St. Clair-Tisdall sought to draw theological conclusions from this line of reasoning. He argued that, since Muslims believe that God alone is the source of the Qur'ān, "if we can trace the teaching of the [Qur'ān], or any part of it, to an earthly Source, or to human systems existing previous to the Prophet's age, then Islam at once falls to the ground."⁶ The

so-called "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament") and also for traditions known from religious texts produced within early Christian communities that were not included in what became the standard New Testament canon. The term "aggadic" (from "Aggadah," narrative or lesson) refers to creative elaborations on stories from the Hebrew Bible as found in rabbinic sources, such as the Talmud and Midrash, and (by extension) in some other early Jewish sources, such as Philo and Josephus. In rabbinic thought, "Aggadah" (or "Haggadah") is often contrasted with "Halakhah," legal interpretation.

² It is my goal in this essay to use names for religious texts, such as "Old Testament," "Hebrew Scriptures," and "New Testament," that reflect the perspectives of the ancient authors and traditions discussed, not as prescriptive directives for all faith traditions.

³ Carl Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, tr. Joel Carmichael and Moshe Perlmann (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1947; orig.: *Geschichte der Islamischen Völker und Staaten* [Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1939]), p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁵ Richard Bell, *The Origins of Islam in Its Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 100–131. The summary given above follows Bell's wording.

⁶ W[illiam] St. Clair-Tisdall, *The Sources of Islam: A Persian Treatise*, tr. and abridged William

basic idea behind this view is that the biblical text is chronologically earlier, more historically accurate, and more authoritative than the apocryphal or aggadic materials, and so the presence of the latter in the Qur'ān represents error or confusion.⁷

The following are well-known examples of extra-biblical elements that are known from apocryphal or aggadic sources and that also appear in the Qur'ān: (1) Throughout the Qur'ān,⁸ Noah is presented as one who preached repentance to his contemporaries. Whereas the text of Genesis makes no reference to his preaching, early Jewish and Christian sources commonly portray Noah as preaching repentance, as in the *Sibylline Oracles* 1.129 and 1:148–198; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.74; *Genesis Rabbah* 30.7; *1 Clement* 7:6; and the *Apocalypse of Paul* 50.⁹ (2) The story is told in the Qur'ān that Abraham as a young man demonstrated the futility of idolatry by breaking a collection of idols and then ironically blaming the deed on a larger idol (Q. 21:57–67); afterwards, Abraham is rescued from fire (Q. 21:69–70, 29:24, and 37:95–99). This story is found in *Genesis Rabbah* 38.13.¹⁰ (3) In the Qur'ān, Moses refuses to feed from wet-nurses (Q. 28:12), which is a theme known from *Bavli Sotah* 12b and Josephus, *Ant.* 2.225–227.¹¹ (4) In Q. 5:110, it is reported that Jesus fashioned a bird out of clay and then brought it to life by breathing into it (cf. Q. 3:49); this is reminiscent of the account in the *Infancy Story of Thomas*, wherein the boy Jesus makes twelve sparrows out of clay and then brings them to life.¹² Each of

Muir (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), p. 2.

⁷See also Theodor Nöldeke, "The Koran," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed. (1883), vol. 16, p. 600; Alphonse Mingana, "Introduction," in Alphonse Mingana and Agnes Smith Lewis, eds., *Leaves from Three Ancient Qurans, Possibly Pre-Othmanic, with a List of Their Variants* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1914), pp. xii–xv and xxiii–xxv; and Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933), pp. 79–81. These scholars followed in the footsteps of Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn, 1833; E.T.: Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, tr. F. M. Young [Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K., 1898; New York: KTAV, 1970]).

⁸Q. 7:59–64, 10:71–73, 11:32–49, 23:23–30, 26:105–120, and 54:9–10. As noted by M. A. S. Haleem, "Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are traditionally termed 'the messengers of firm resolve' for their tenacity in preaching God's message" (M. A. S. Haleem, tr., *The Qur'ān* [Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2005], p. 330). Quotations from the Qur'ān in this essay follow the translation given by Haleem.

⁹Cf. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 9.15; *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 22; *Bavli Sanhedrin* 108b; 2 Pet 2:5; Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 3.19; and Methodius, *Symposium* 10.3.

¹⁰See also *Eliyahu Rabbah* (5) 6; see William G. (Gershon Zev) Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, tr., *Tanna Debe Eliyahu* (The Lore of the School of Elijah) (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), pp. 62–63. Cf. the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, chaps. 1–6, in which Abraham's father is an idol-maker, and Abraham recognizes the truth by seeing idols break; Pseudo-Philo 6:1–18 and 23:5, according to which Abraham is thrown into the fire; and *Targum Neofiti* Gen. 11:31 and 15:7, wherein Abraham is rescued from the fire of the furnace of the Chaldeans.

¹¹See also *Exodus Rabbah* 1.15. In the Jewish versions, Moses refuses these wet-nurses because they are Egyptian and not Hebrew.

¹²*Infancy Story of Thomas* 2.2–4; see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, E.T. ed. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 1:444. See also Suleiman A. Mourad, "On the Qur'anic Stories about Mary and Jesus," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Interfaith Studies* 1 (Autumn, 1999): 13–24. According to Mourad, the version of the Annunciation of Jesus in Q. 19:16–22 shares basic elements with Lk. 1:26–38, but in Q. 3:45–49 the story is quite different and in many respects resembles the account in the *Protevangelium of James* 11:1–3, wherein the Annunciation is preceded by the tale of Mary's birth and her upbringing in the Tem-

these parallels has been seen as evidence that post-biblical exegetical traditions were used in the composition of the Qur'ān.

Searching for Sources in the New Testament

For many Christian scholars who sought to identify sources for the Qur'ān, Arabic was essentially a tool for interpreting the language of the Hebrew Bible. Their training in biblical criticism no doubt encouraged their critical explorations of the Qur'ān. In fact, some may have been attracted to the Qur'ān precisely because it was a more socially acceptable subject for critical inquiry than the Bible. Still, during this same time period (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), Christian scholars were likewise identifying apocryphal sources for the New Testament.¹³ The existence of such sources has been seen as a problem by many Christian commentators because it is expected that New Testament writers, as inspired by God, should rely only on canonical, Old Testament writings when dealing with Old Testament history.

Numerous passages have been identified in which a New Testament author appears to be relaying information about a biblical character that does not derive strictly from the Hebrew Bible but draws on extra- or post-biblical Jewish tradition.¹⁴ Examples include the following: (1) the description of Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” in 2 Pet. 2:5, which seems to follow early Jewish tradition (see above); (2) the identification of Pharaoh’s magicians as Jannes and Jambres in 2 Tim. 3:8; “Jannes and his brother” are mentioned in the *Damascus Document* 5.18 from Qumran; Pliny’s *Natural History* 30.2.11 mentions “Jannes”; and “Jannes and Jambres” are both named in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Ex. 1:15 and 7:11; Num. 22:22), *Bavli Menahot* 85a, and *Exodus Rabbah* 9.7; (3) the reference in Jude 9 to the archangel Michael’s disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses, which is not narrated in the Bible but is said by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the fifth-century church historian Gelasius of Cyzicus to have come from a work called the *Assumption of Moses*, which may be an earlier version of the work preserved partially in Latin known as the *Testament of Moses*;¹⁵ and (4) the quotation of Enoch’s prophecy in Jude 14–15, known from the pseudepigraphic work *1 Enoch* 1:9. As was the case with the Qur'ān,

ple and culminates in the angel’s announcement that Mary will conceive by the word of God.

¹³E.g., Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Kurze Erklärung der Briefe an Titus, Timotheus und die Hebräer* (Leipzig, 1847), pp. 46–47; and Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909), pp. 276 and 330–336.

¹⁴On this topic, see the “New Testament Citations of and Allusions to Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Writings,” in Lee M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), pp. 452–464; and the early Jewish sources utilized in M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995).

¹⁵Clement of Alexandria, *Comments on the Epistle of Jude* (see Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867–73; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971], p. 573; and *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 17.207); Origen, *On First Principles* 3.2.1; and Gelasius of Cyzicus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.21.7 (cf. 2.17.17). Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), pp. 65–76.

these parallels suggest that New Testament writers relied on sources of unrecognized authority.

Similar Issues but Different Responses

The fundamental issue for the New Testament is the same as that for the Qur'ān, namely, the reception of ancient narratives through historical channels that allowed for elaborations and expansions. Yet, in spite of this similarity, Christians and Muslims have formulated different responses to this phenomenon, both in ancient times and since the rise of modern scholarship, due to their different theological ideas about revelation and history.

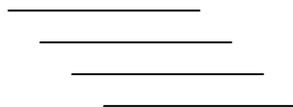
Rather than focusing on criticisms made by Muslim and Christian scholars against each other's sacred books, I will discuss arguments in defense of the respective books made by scholars of each religion. First we look at how Christians have attempted to explain the apocryphal elements in the New Testament. Then, we will consider how Muslims have addressed the topic surrounding the apparent use of apocryphal or aggadic elements in the Qur'ān. My primary observation will relate to the distinctive ways that Christians and Muslims have treated this issue in view of the differing relationship that each group has with the Hebrew Bible.

Christian Scholars on Apocryphal Elements in the New Testament

Christians in antiquity took a variety of approaches in dealing with the presence of Jewish apocryphal elements in the New Testament. The problem for Christians stemmed from their belief in a canonical collection of Scriptures (the Jewish Scriptures or "Old Testament"), which was available to be consulted and was regarded as uniquely inspired. If New Testament texts contained information about the Old Testament world that could not be found within the Old Testament itself, this potentially constituted a problem for the correctness or unique inspiration of the Old Testament.

One obvious way that Jewish intertestamental material entered into the Christian Bible was through Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures. In addressing the charge that Christian citations of the Old Testament did not match the true text of Israel's Scriptures, Justin Martyr insisted that his Christian citations agreed with the original form of Israel's Scriptures, and that, if contemporary copies did not agree with his Christian citations, this was because the Jews had falsified the texts. Justin often defended his Christian readings by appealing to the authority of the Septuagint, even when the Septuagint text as preserved agrees not with Justin but with the reading that Justin called "Jewish."¹⁶ He was

¹⁶See Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy—A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), pp. 25–46 and 90–91. E.g., at Gen. 49:10, the Septuagint as preserved reads, "until the things laid up for him come." Justin, however, claimed that this was the Jewish reading, and he claimed that the Septuagint reads, "until



convinced that his Christian citations of the Old Testament could be used to verify the authenticity of preserved Old Testament manuscripts; any deviation from the Christian citation showed that the manuscript had been falsified by the Jews. In the end, the charge of textual corruption continued to be part of the unfortunate history of Christian anti-Jewish polemic,¹⁷ but it did not play a major role in Christian approaches to dealing with apocryphal elements in the New Testament. Generally speaking, arguments were employed that accepted the trustworthiness of the Old Testament as preserved.

In at least one case—namely, the quotation of *I Enoch* in Jude—the issue of an extra-biblical quotation had direct bearing on the perception of the canon. On the one hand, as Jerome reported in *On Illustrious Men* 4, “Because in it [the epistle of Jude] he quotes from the apocryphal book of Enoch, it is rejected by many.”¹⁸ On the other hand, both Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian accepted the authenticity of *I Enoch* on the basis of its usage in Jude.¹⁹ Tertullian supposed that Noah could have faithfully preserved Enoch’s work or else renewed it under the guidance of the Spirit if it had been destroyed. Thus, at the extremes, one could either exclude a book because it uses apocryphal material, or, alternatively, one could accept the apocryphal work as part of the canon because it is cited by an authorized book.²⁰

A more nuanced position was also held by some Christians in antiquity, who accepted the authenticity of the Enoch quotation in Jude but not necessarily the whole book of Enoch. Thus, Augustine believed on the basis of Jude’s authority that Enoch did prophesy, but he argued that the book of *I Enoch* was not accepted because it is so ancient that its authenticity could not be verified.²¹ Bede recognized the legitimacy of Jude’s quotation of *I Enoch* because the quotation accords with true teaching, but he acknowledged that Enoch was not the author of the whole book and that much else in *I Enoch* is unbelievable and false.²² In Augustine we see an attempt to explain historically why Christians did

he come for whom it is laid up,” which does not match any manuscript evidence for the Greek Bible but may have been taken by Justin from a Christian *Testimonia* list. Justin took his reading as a reference to Jesus, and he suggested that the Jews had willfully expunged such references from the Old Testament (cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 120.4–5).

¹⁷See Irven M. Resnick, “The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics,” *Medieval Encounters*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1996), pp. 344–380; and William Adler, “The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemics,” in *Translations of Scripture* (*JQR* suppl., 1990), pp. 1–27.

¹⁸See Thomas P. Halton, tr., *Saint Jerome: On Illustrious Men* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 11.

¹⁹See Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women* 1.2–3; *The Veiling of Virgins* 7; *Idolatry* 4; Clement of Alexandria, *Comments on the Epistle of Jude*. Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *I Enoch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 89–90.

²⁰Furthermore, the book of *I Enoch* was preserved in classical Geʿez as part of the Ethiopic Bible.

²¹*City of God* 18.38.

²²*On the Epistle of Jude* 14 (see *Patrologia Latina* 93.128–129). According to Jude, “It should be known that the book of Enoch, from which Jude took this, is reckoned among the apocryphal writings by the church, not because something actually said by so great a patriarch could ever be disrespected or ought to be considered false, but because the book that circulates under the name of Enoch was not really written by him, but was published by someone else under the title of his name. For if it were truly by him, it would not be contrary to sound faith. But as it is, since the book con-

not accept *1 Enoch*, even though Jude identifies one passage as prophecy. In Bede we see Christian doctrine (“bright truth of true light”) used as a criterion to validate the authenticity of only that part of *1 Enoch* quoted by Jude.

In considering this more nuanced position, one may legitimately ask: How was this single snippet of true prophecy from Enoch, later to be incorporated into *1 Enoch*, preserved down to the time of the apostles? An answer to this kind of question can be seen in the comments of John Chrysostom and Theodoret on Paul’s knowledge of the names Jannes and Jambres. According to Chrysostom, either Paul knew their names through tradition, or else he simply knew them by inspiration.²³ Theodoret specified that Paul knew an “unwritten tradition of the Jews.”²⁴ Chrysostom and Theodoret were primarily concerned with how Paul could have learned this information, and they (especially Theodoret) were open to the possibility that these names were preserved through human channels of transmission.

Origen, for his part, was clearly aware that apocryphal texts served as sources for the New Testament,²⁵ and his primary concern dealt with the separation of truth from error. He offered his own assessment of the situation in the preface to his commentary on the Song of Songs:

But it is common knowledge that the apostles and evangelists borrowed and put into the New Testament many things that we read nowhere in the Scriptures that we account canonical, but that are found none the less in the apocryphal writings, and are quite obviously taken from them. Not that the apocryphal writings are to be given a place in this way: we must *not overpass the everlasting limits which our fathers have set* [cf. Prov. 22:28]. But it may be that the apostles and evangelists, being filled with the Holy Spirit, knew what was to be taken out of those writings and what must be rejected; whereas we, who have not such abundance of the Spirit, cannot without danger presume so to select.²⁶

According to Origen, New Testament writers used apocryphal books, but the Holy Spirit was their guide in discerning what to use and what not to use in these writings. As exemplified in Origen, at least some Christians in antiquity were willing to affirm that only the part of the apocryphal book that was quoted by

tains many unbelievable accounts, such as regarding giants that had not human fathers but angelic, it is justly obvious to learned people that it was not written by truthful men, but is soiled with falsehood. Thus, because this epistle of Jude has a testimony from an apocryphal book, it was rejected by many in earlier times. Yet, Jude deserves to be counted among the sacred Scriptures because of its authority up to the present, its old age, and its usage—especially since the testimony that Jude cites is not apocryphal and dubious, but is distinguished by the bright truth of true light” (my translation).

²³*Homilies on 2 Timothy, Hom. 8*

²⁴*Commentary on 2 Timothy* 3:8. As Theodoret said, “The divine apostle, of course, got their name not from the divine Scripture but from the unwritten tradition of the Jews. It was likely that the grace of the Spirit also revealed them to him” (see Robert Hill, tr., *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul* [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001], 2:44 [cf. *Patrologia Graeca* 82.848]).

²⁵Cf. Origen’s comments in *On First Principles* 3.2.1, with regard to the *Assumption of Moses*.

²⁶Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, tr. and ann. R. P. Lawson, *Ancient Christian Writers* 26 (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1956), Prologue, p. 56; emphasis in original.

the New Testament was trustworthy.

Since the rise of modern biblical criticism, biblical commentators have become more comfortable with the idea of human traditions as sources for the New Testament. Many recent commentators simply acknowledge the New Testament's use of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha and explain the text without addressing it as a theological problem.²⁷ Others, however, not only recognize the reality of these sources but also offer guidance on how to make sense of this phenomenon. Thus, Peter Davids affirmed that Jude appealed to *1 Enoch* as an authority, but he explained this perspective in Jude by saying that "canonical consciousness came later than the time of Jude."²⁸ Richard Bauckham treated the quotation of *1 Enoch* in Jude as the key text in Jude's "midrash."²⁹ These comments reflect the desire both to acknowledge Jude's positive use of *1 Enoch* and also to justify Jude's practice by appealing to history (development of the canon) or genre (midrash).

Other recent commentators are less ready to acknowledge any difference between the New Testament perspective and their own modern Christian perspective on these apocryphal elements. Commenting on 2 Pet. 2:5, Thomas Schreiner stated, "That Noah proclaimed God's righteousness is a fair deduction from the Old Testament itself"³⁰—in other words, the idea of Noah's preaching is based solely on the canonical Old Testament and does not reflect extra-biblical tradition at all. In his comments on 2 Tim. 3:8, George Knight said that "there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the Jewish tradition" regarding the names Jannes and Jambres,³¹ implying that the accuracy of these names is reliable by modern standards. J. Daryl Charles suggested that Jude quoted *1 Enoch* only because his opponents valued apocalyptic traditions and would have found *1 Enoch* convincing, even if Jude himself (as with most modern Christians) did not recognize its authority.³² Gleason Archer, discussing the dispute between Michael and the Devil that is reported in Jude 9, suggested that this was a historical event, that it was transmitted accurately to New Testament writers through oral tradition, and that Jude identified it as true through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³³ Archer's position follows lines of reasoning worked out during the patristic period.

This is merely a selection of recent attempts by Christian scholars to address the problem of apocryphal elements in the New Testament. The overarching concern for Christian scholars, both ancient and modern, is to reconcile the New

²⁷E.g., J. N. D. Kelly, in *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: A & C Black; and New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 278, argued that the writer of Jude believed that *1 Enoch* was historically authentic and inspired, but Kelly offered no theological justification or reflection.

²⁸Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; and Nottingham, U.K.: Apollos, 2006), p. 76.

²⁹Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 100.

³⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), p. 339.

³¹George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; and Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1999), p. 435.

³²J. Daryl Charles, "Jude's Use of Pseudepigraphical Source-Material as Part of a Literary Strategy," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1991), p. 144.

³³Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), p. 430.

Testament's use of noncanonical sources with the existence of an authoritative and uniquely inspired canonical Old Testament.

Muslim Scholars on Apocryphal Elements in the Qur'ān

When we turn to consider how this issue has been treated within the context of Islamic scholarship, the most obvious and significant point to make is that, while Islam does acknowledge prophetic revelation prior to the Prophet Muhammad, it does not recognize any preserved version of the Jewish or Christian Scriptures as canonical. As a result, the relationship of the Qur'ān to previous noncanonical biblical literature is no more or less a problem than the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Bible. On the one hand, this could be seen as a difficulty for Muslim scholars, since any previous Bible-related material that contradicts the Qur'ān, whether or not it is canonical for Jews or Christians, could be used to challenge the Qur'ān's accuracy. On the other hand, the Islamic view of previous revelation can be theologically constructive for Muslims, because parallels between the Qur'ān and any Bible-related texts (canonical or otherwise) can be ascribed to the genuine stream of prophetic revelation that has been preserved in previous communities. In light of this Islamic view, our first task is to trace the main lines of thought within traditional Muslim scholarship on the relationship between the Qur'ān and previous scriptural revelation.

First, on various occasions the Qur'ān appears to acknowledge the authenticity of scriptural revelations made to figures in the past, including Moses and Jesus. For example, Q. 5:44 says, "We revealed the Torah (*Tawrāt*) with guidance and light," and Q. 5:46 says, "We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him. We gave him the Gospel (*Injīl*) with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed."³⁴ In view of such statements, it is not surprising that Muslims in the first century or two of the Islamic era showed considerable interest in biblical and Bible-related lore.³⁵ This information could be used to fill out the stories of prophets (such as Abraham, Moses, and Noah) who were only alluded to in the Qur'ān, as the Qur'ān seems to presume on the part of the reader/listener some

³⁴Referring to the Qur'ān, Q. 46:12 states, "the scripture of Moses was revealed before it as a guide and a mercy," and Q. 10:94 says to Muhammad, "If you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you" (see also Q. 3:3 and 9:111).

³⁵E.g., see Sidney H. Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture: The Bible in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in the Middle Ages," in Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman, eds., *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), pp. 31–33; Vernon K. Robbins and Gordon D. Newby, "A Prolegomenon to the Relation of the Qur'ān and the Bible," in John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 24 (2003) (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), pp. 24–25; Andrew Rippin, "Interpreting the Bible through the Qur'ān," in G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kadar A. Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'an*, Routledge/SOAS Series on Contemporary Politics and Culture in the Middle East (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 251–253; and Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2002), p. 91.

knowledge of these figures.³⁶ A saying of Muhammad was preserved from the first Islamic centuries that granted permission to report stories concerning the Israelites, and biblical material related to the Qurʾān seems to have been available to Muslims from early Jewish and Christian converts to Islam.³⁷ Thus, a tradition preserved in a qurʾānic commentary states that the Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 656) was sought out for information on Moses and Joshua because of his knowledge of the Torah and prophets.³⁸ Traditions related to the Bible were transmitted in the Islamic context in literature, such as the “Stories of the Prophets” (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) and collections of *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, which included Jewish stories about biblical prophets.³⁹ After the first two centuries of Islam, Muslim scholars began to reject the use of biblical traditions in explaining the Qurʾān, due to Christian polemical pressure,⁴⁰ the development of the doctrine of the Qurʾān’s inimitability (*ʾIjāz*, “uniqueness”),⁴¹ and the application of more stringent criteria for ascertaining a sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) “chain of transmission” (*isnād*) for such information.⁴² But, for early Muslim scholars, biblical and Bible-related stories were a potentially valid source of information for elucidating the Qurʾān.

At the same time, it was never the case that Muslim intellectuals regarded Jewish or Christian Scriptures as completely authoritative. For example, in a Christian literary dialogue between the Christian Bishop Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 755–830) and a Muslim, the Muslim interlocutor is said to have challenged Theodore, “Prove this to me, not from your Isaiah or your Matthew, which I don’t much care for, but from notions that are necessary, shared, and universally acknowledged.”⁴³

The most important explanation among Muslims for the lack of authority invested in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures is that the texts of these scriptures have not been preserved faithfully among the “People of the Book.” This charge of the “distortion” (*Tahrīf*) of the biblical text finds its basis in the Qurʾān itself. For example, Q. 3:78 says, “There are some who twist the Scripture with their tongues to make you [pl.] think that what they say is part of the Scripture when it is not; they say it is from God when it is not; they attribute lies to God and they know it” (cf. Q. 2:75, 79; 5:41–45; and 6:91–93). An early report of the “distortion” charge is given by Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), who transmitted a

³⁶Sidney H. Griffith, “The Gospel, the Qurʾān, and the Presentation of Jesus in al-Yaʿqubi’s *Taʾrīkh*,” in Reeves, *Bible and Qurʾān*, p. 134; and Rippin, “Interpreting the Bible,” p. 251.

³⁷Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 89–91; and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 47.

³⁸Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, p. 90.

³⁹Griffith, “The Gospel,” p. 135, and Robbins and Newby, “Prolegomenon,” p. 24.

⁴⁰Rippin, “Interpreting the Bible,” p. 254; and Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” p. 32.

⁴¹Robbins and Newby, “Prolegomenon,” p. 24.

⁴²Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad,” in Reeves, *Bible and Qurʾān*, p. 129; and Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, p. 101.

⁴³See John C. Lamoreaux, tr., *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), p. 221. The work in question, called the *Refutations of the Saracens*, was transmitted as part of the corpus of Theodore’s Greek writings, but it is now thought to be by a certain John the Deacon (see Lamoreaux’s “Introduction,” p. xxix). Also, a ninth-century Christian Arabic text reports this quotation from a Muslim: “We do not accept anything from the Old [Testament] nor from the New [Testament] because we do not recognize them” (see Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” p. 34).

Ḥadīth ascribed to ‘Uthman stating that Jews added to the Torah what they liked and deleted from the Torah things that they did not like, such as Muhammad’s name.⁴⁴ Another *Ḥadīth*, preserved in *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī*, clarifies the charge of corruption as follows: “O community of Muslims, how is it that you ask the People of the Book? Your book, which was brought down upon His Prophet, is the most recent information about God. You read an unadulterated book. God has related to you that the People of the Book exchanged that which God wrote, changing the book with their hands.”⁴⁵

Various arguments were brought forth by Muslim scholars to demonstrate that the Bible as preserved by Jews and Christians had been distorted in transmission and to explain how this distortion had taken place. An important figure in this regard was the eleventh-century Muslim scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), who pointed to problems in the Bible itself to prove that the Bible was not an accurate record of past revelation. For example, Ibn Ḥazm argued that (1) the Bible as preserved contains chronological inaccuracies, such as the statement in Genesis 15 that Israel would be afflicted for 400 years in Egypt, which does not fit the chronology implied elsewhere; (2) the Bible contains geographical inaccuracies, such as the description of the four streams in Genesis 2; (3) the Bible describes God in absurdly anthropomorphic terms, such as the idea that God rested on the seventh day; and (4) the Bible ascribes to prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and David scandalous behavior that is slanderous against them.⁴⁶

In terms of how the distortion of the Bible took place, Ibn Ḥazm said that the Bible lacked reliable transmission (*Tawātur*) because it was handed down from one single priest to another, during a long period of time when many of the priests and rulers in Israel were corrupt, and this scenario virtually guaranteed distortions, interpolations, and omissions.⁴⁷ According to Samau’al al-Maghribī, a twelfth-century Jewish convert to Islam, the distortion of the Bible was inevitable in light of Israel’s tumultuous political history and their impiety, as shown in worshiping idols and killing their own prophets.⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), author of the polemical work *Critique of Christian Origins*, described a slow process whereby Christians distorted the gospel in order to satisfy the pagan Romans, with whom they were joining forces in order to gain power and achieve dominance over the Jews.⁴⁹ Thus, although true revelations were given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, the Bible as preserved by Jews and Christians cannot be relied upon as a source for accurate information about those revelations. No higher status is ascribed to canonical Jewish and Christian Scriptures than to extra-biblical traditions preserved by Jews or Christians.⁵⁰

⁴⁴Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁵Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1420/1990), 2:182. The translation is that of Gabriel Said Reynolds in his *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, *Islamic History and Civilization Studies and Texts* 56 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), p. 84.

⁴⁶Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 26–35.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁹Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, pp. 85–86.

⁵⁰Nevertheless, one should take note of the (untypical) argument made by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) that it is impossible that the Jews could have corrupted the Torah, “because custom prevents

In addition to the charge of distortion, another stance that Muslims took toward the Bible was to claim that biblical texts predicted the prophetic activity of Muhammad. Again, the Qurʾān provided the starting point for this approach, as in Q. 61:6: “Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Praised (*Aḥmad*).’”⁵¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe refers to an “‘Emmaus moment’ in Islamic thought,” when Muslim scholars realized that they could identify prooftexts from Jewish and Christian Scriptures that announced ahead of time the coming of Muhammad.⁵² Key biblical texts that were read as predictions of the prophet Muhammad include: Dt. 18:18, “I will raise up a prophet like you [Moses] from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command”;⁵³ Is. 60:1–7, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you, etc.,” where the light that dispels the darkness of polytheism (*Shirk*) is Muhammad;⁵⁴ and Jn. 15:26 wherein Jesus promises the coming of the “Paraclete”; this verse was already known in a slightly modified form to Ibn Ishāq (d. c. 767), who summed up his interpretation by saying that the Syriac word for “Paraclete” means “Muhammad.”⁵⁵ Obviously, these arguments work best apologetically if Muslim scholars use texts that are recognized as scriptural by Jews and Christians, rather than apocryphal texts. Yet, as shown by Ibn Ishāq’s quotation of John 15, a Muslim scholar might quote a biblical text in a slightly modified or “Islamicized” form, as Sidney Griffith has argued, not because the source disagreed with the preserved Christian reading but because the scholar felt authorized to “correct” the text on the authority of Islamic teaching, on the assumption that the Christian version must have been corrupted.⁵⁶ In this way, the arguments of “distortion” and “prediction” could work together.

From a Muslim standpoint, the solution to the problem of distortion is that

people who have a revealed religion from dealing with their divine scriptures in such a manner” (see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Qurʾānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 [June, 1996]: 146).

⁵¹See also Q. 7:157, which speaks of “the Messenger, the ‘unlettered’ (*Ummī*) prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel.”

⁵²McAuliffe, “Qurʾānic Context,” p. 148. Cf. Luke 24. In addition to Q. 7:157, McAuliffe also pointed to Q. 2:127–129 and Q. 61:6 as key Qurʾānic texts for the view that Jewish and Christian Scriptures foretold Muhammad.

⁵³McAuliffe, “Qurʾānic Context,” p. 152.

⁵⁴Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 85.

⁵⁵Thus concludes Ibn Ishāq: “*Al-Munahmānā* in Syriac is Muhammad, and in Greek it is *al-baraqlītūs*. God’s prayer and peace be upon him” (see Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” pp. 36–37). The Peshitta of John 15:26 (*Paraqlitā*) imitates the Greek word. Perhaps in view is a passive participle of the Syriac root *nwh* (“delighted in”).

⁵⁶Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” p. 38. See also Griffith, “The Gospel,” p. 140. Cf. S. M. Stern, “Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in ‘Abd al-Jabbār,” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 18 (April, 1967): 42–44, who argues that ‘Abd al-Jabbār quotes a Gospel text showing that Jesus was not really crucified, which al-Jabbār believes to be from one of the canonical Gospels, but which Stern thinks came from an apocryphal Gospel. Yet, following Griffith’s logic, this quotation could be al-Jabbār’s “Islamicization” of a related text from one of the canonical Gospels.

the Qur'ān serves as the standard by which earlier revelation can be evaluated.⁵⁷ The Qur'ān provided a foundation for this idea in passages such as Q. 5:48, "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them" (cf. Q. 16:43–44). This was the view of Muslim scholars in the Middle Ages, and it has remained the normative view to the present.

We may now briefly consider a few examples of modern Islamic treatments of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Bible and even the question of apocryphal elements in the Qur'ān, as viewed by Muslim scholars in the West who have engaged with modern historical criticism. The equivalent status given to apocryphal and canonical Gospels and the authoritative function of the Qur'ān in discerning truth from error in all previous sources are reflected in the commentary of Abdullah Yusuf Ali on Q. 3:49: "This miracle of the clay birds is found in some of the apocryphal Gospels; those of curing the blind and the lepers and raising the dead are in the canonical Gospels. The original Gospel (see 3.48) was not the various stories written afterwards by disciples, but the real Message taught direct by Jesus."⁵⁸ That the Qur'ān's version of prophetic history is accurate and biblical versions are inaccurate was defended by Maulana Muhammad Ali using arguments similar to those of Ibn Ḥazm, namely, that the Qur'ān removes contradictions and defects found in the Bible that have cast a slur on the character of the prophets.⁵⁹ Muhammad Asad argued, with regard to the story of Abraham and the fire, that the Qur'ān never actually says that Abraham was miraculously kept alive within the fire but, rather, states that Abraham was saved from being thrown into the fire at all; according to Asad, the classical commentators who said that Abraham was kept alive in the fire were merely following Talmudic legends and may therefore be disregarded.⁶⁰

A thorough defense of the Qur'ān *vis-à-vis* the Bible is presented in the series of books published by Jay R. Crook under the general title, *The Bible: An Islamic Perspective*.⁶¹ Particularly interesting features of Crook's perspective include his use of modern biblical criticism to undermine the Bible's claim to be the "correct" version of prophetic history⁶² and his suggestion that not all of the

⁵⁷See Rippin, "Interpreting the Bible," p. 249.

⁵⁸Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (1934; repr., Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2005), p. 135.

⁵⁹Maulana Muhammad Ali, *History of the Prophets* (Dublin, OH: Islam Lahore, 1996), p. iv. In the comments in idem, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary*, New Edition (Dublin, OH: Islam Lahore, 2002), pp. 656–657, Ali suggested that the "bird" in Q. 3:49 was not meant by Jesus to be taken literally but was meant metaphorically and was later misunderstood in a literalistic sense by the *Gospel of the Infancy*.

⁶⁰Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (1980; repr., Bristol, U.K.: The Book Foundation, 2003), p. 553.

⁶¹E.g., Jay R. Crook, *The Bible: An Islamic Perspective—Introduction to the Old Testament* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2005); and idem, *The Bible: An Islamic Perspective—Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2005).

⁶²E.g., Crook, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 3–4 and 12–13. In his *The Bible: An Islamic Perspective—Jesus* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2005), p. 93, Crook accepted the idea that the *Gospel of Thomas*, which is closer to the Qur'ān on the point in question, originated between 45 and 70 C.E. and is therefore earlier than the canonical Gospels.

traditions cited by the Qur'ān are historical,⁶³ while at the same time maintaining his commitment to the truthfulness of the Qur'ān in terms of its religious and moral purposes.⁶⁴ One can see in these comments both traditional Islamic viewpoints and the impact of modern thinking.

Conclusion: Theological Assets and Challenges

Both the Qur'ān and the New Testament share the fact of having received “biblical” traditions not always directly from the Hebrew Bible but through processes of transmission that allowed for elaborations on the earlier stories. In many cases, a given elaboration may have been created originally in response to an issue in a specific biblical text, but, over time, the new story element (for example, the names of Pharaoh’s magicians) takes on a life of its own apart from its original “exegetical” function and eventually comes to be seen as part of the text itself. Later authors who retell the biblical story may not even know that the elaboration is not an original part of the biblical text. This process, which James Kugel called “legendizing,”⁶⁵ is a shared phenomenon between Christians and Muslims with respect to their sacred texts.

At the same time, learned Christians and Muslims have taken different approaches to explaining how their own “elaborated” versions of given narratives relate to the biblical versions, in keeping with their differing ideas about prophecy and revelation.

Christians have a canonical document, the Old Testament, which constitutes revelation prior to the New Testament. Accordingly, the simplest theological explanation for the presence of any Bible-related material in the New Testament is that all such material derives solely from the Old Testament. Yet, even though this is the most uncomplicated solution in theory, it is difficult to argue in some cases based on the textual evidence that is preserved. Christians have also appealed to supposedly accurate oral or written traditions, or else divine inspiration, in explaining the use of apocryphal materials. The appeal to extra-biblical traditions is often credible, but it can be difficult to make a plausible historical argument for the accuracy of these traditions, which often relate to the narrative world of Genesis or Exodus but are preserved in much later sources. The appeal to divine revelation re-

⁶³E.g., Crook, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 34. Crook appealed to Q. 3:7, which is a key text for the traditional distinction between “allegorical” and “categorical” verses: “There is no God but Him, the Mighty, the Wise: it is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the Scripture—and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’—only those with real perception will take heed.” On this verse, see Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A User’s Guide* (Oxford: One-world, 2005), pp. 58–59 and 75–77.

⁶⁴E.g., Crook, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 33–41.

⁶⁵See James L. Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” in Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 99–100; and James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 23–29 and 39.

solves the problem without concern for history. Meanwhile, some Christians have been willing to accept the use of noncanonical sources for the New Testament by emphasizing the specific historical context of New Testament writers and acknowledging that their historical and literary judgments were shaped by their environment.

In Islam, since there is no preserved canonical document prior to the Qur'ān, there is no problem accepting parallels with any previous canonical or extra-canonical Jewish or Christian texts. Whatever matches the Qur'ān is valid revelation preserved in both sources, and whatever does not is regarded as inaccurately preserved. In this way, Muslim scholars have had an easier time addressing biblical parallels than have Christian scholars in addressing ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Old Testament, since, while a Muslim can accept a Gospel parallel as reflecting earlier revelation given to Jesus, a Christian scholar cannot ascribe the same kind of revelatory status to a parallel found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Code of Hammurabi*. For Muslim scholars, the fact that alternative versions of qur'ānic narratives exist in Hebrew Bible, noncanonical Jewish, and early Christian texts that significantly pre-date the time of the Prophet Muhammad represents a potential historical problem. Yet, this problem has been addressed by adopting certain conclusions of modern critical scholarship on the Bible and by engaging in constructive reflection on the genre and ultimate purpose of the Qur'ān.

Both Muslim and Christian scholars throughout the centuries have formulated careful arguments suited to their own theological contexts to address the problem of sources for their sacred texts. In each religious tradition, there have been points of tension, as well as moments of cooperation, between theological concerns and historical research. An example of cooperation between theology and history is the assertion that the divine purpose of a sacred text is to teach religious truth and that this truth may be communicated through a text whose historical "accuracy" is limited by the literary and historical conventions of the human authors. Through such cooperation, theological reflection has been able to create space for historical research to take place within the context of faith.