

Study Guide for The Inspiration and Translation of the Bible

To be used along with the video of the same name on www.ChristianfromMuslim.com

Summary and Notes:

Quick summary: Today's lesson discusses the inspiration of the Bible, and how that differs from the way the Qur'an and other holy books claim to have been inspired. It also explains the how and why of Bible translations. We point out that the various packaging and translations of the Bible do not mean different Bibles.

Reality – Enjoy the Gifts and Worship the Giver

Dr. Cynthia and Huda enjoy a beautiful day and great meal on the coast in Fort Bragg, California. Huda loves nature. We watch Huda enjoying a walk and worshipping God in a California coastal forest. Although Huda's life in America lacks the riches and prestige of her former life, God blesses her here with beautiful experiences, good food, and friends.

Today's reality segments illustrate 1 Timothy 6:17,

“Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.”

Materialism. Christians should trust in God, the giver, and not the gifts. This is such an important lesson for us all to learn. Christian teachers should help new believers learn to trust God in all things.

America is noticeably materialistic. Muslim countries also have materialism, although perhaps of a different kind. New Christians from a Muslim background face challenges with materialism that traditional Christians might not be aware of. Here we discuss two types of materialism we have seen which are somewhat unique to their cultures:

Security in dowry. For women, a *maher*, is a type of wedding dowry that is given to them by their groom as a degree of security to compensate for the ease of which they can be divorced. They keep it like what we would call “a nest egg” in Western culture. Some of that can be jewelry.

Muslim women are often married very young and uneducated. They are incapable of supporting themselves, and become even less able once they start producing the large number of children typical for their cultures. Without a personal relationship with God, it is easy to understand why they cling to hope in their *maher*.

Putting on a show. Another materialistic snare is new wealth. In Gulf region countries, oil money has lifted societies from poverty to fantastic wealth within a generation.

“Cynthia, you should understand. Now we are rich,” said one former Gulf resident, “but in the 1960s our houses were mud brick, and we brought our water in from Iran in barrels with donkeys.”

Now in that same place appearing fashionable and extravagant is of great importance. A case can be made that the entire nation is what has been called *nouveau riche* (a term meaning showing off new money).

Once Dr. Cynthia was teaching a former Muslim from the Gulf, the Bible verse 1 John 2:15,

“Do not love the world nor the things it offers you.” (NLT)

With eyes like saucers, the shocked new believer asked, “Why not?” The response was made with such innocent passion, and was so different from what Westerners would say that Dr. C scarcely knew how to respond.

How were the authors of the Bible inspired?

“Prophecy never came simply because a prophet wanted it to. Instead, the Holy Spirit guided the prophets as they spoke. So, although prophets are human, prophecy comes from God.”

2 Peter 1:21 (NIRV)

In this Bible passage, the Apostle Peter tells us that Scripture was inspired as a prophet was guided by the Holy Spirit. Looking through the Old and New Testaments, we find numerous examples of God inspiring men and women with his words in this way.

This differs from the dictation form of “inspiration” recounted by other so-called prophets. Compare Biblical inspiration with that of two other popular prophets, neither of which are accepted by mainstream Christianity:

1. Islam reports that Prophet Mohammed received his revelations for the Qur’an as a series from “Angel Gabriel,” at least one for each book (surah) of the Qur’an. It also reports that Mohammed was afraid after his first “revelation,” and not even certain if the angel that appeared to him was from God, or a demon. (See bonus material below)
2. Joseph Smith, the prophet of Mormonism, also claimed to receive revelation from an angel. He claims that the English translation of the cryptic tablets of Mormonism reportedly appeared to him in a box-like device.

The revelations of each of these prophets were different than those of the Bible, which came before them. Although both Mohammed and Joseph Smith claimed to have supernatural revelation from an angel, recall that as we discuss elsewhere, presentation from an angel is not a guarantee that the message is from God.

Galatians 1:8 tells us that even if an angel brings a message, if it is a different one from that of Jesus and his disciples, it must be rejected. The messages that both Joseph Smith and Mohammed brought were a different sort of “gospel” than that of Jesus. If the guidance of Galatians 1:8 had been applied in the cases of both these prophets and their followers, they would have known that the revelations they received were not from God, and their movements would not have started.

How does God speak in the Bible?

How God speaks in the Bible is important for believers to know – especially those coming from a Muslim background. In this lesson, Dr. Cynthia discusses the primary three ways God speaks in the Bible:

- **Directly**
- **Indirectly**
- **Implied**

In Islam, almost every chapter begins with a direct claim to be speaking words from Allah to people. (The *Fatiha*, the first surah or chapter, is a notable exception.) For example, at the beginning of Surah 2, known as the *Book of The Cow*,

“Bismallah ar-rahman ar-raheem” (in the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate)

When Muslims read a holy book, they are expecting to see these words. To them they are a key that the surah should be considered as coming directly from God. No book or chapter of the Bible begins this way. To those used to reading the Qur’an, the absence of these words can cause misunderstanding when reading the Bible.

In the Bible, God speaks in several different ways. Yes, the Bible does have passages which claim to be God speaking directly, but this is expressed differently. So, for a Muslim who begins to read the Bible, this absence can make it difficult to accept that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

God speaking DIRECTLY in the Bible

In order for Muslims to understand the difference in Biblical inspiration from what they expect, Dr. Cynthia points out that there are places where the Bible **directly** reports what God says, for example, in Jeremiah 21,

“This is what the Lord says...”

We see similar examples in Exodus 34:6, Jonah 4:2. And very rarely a voice is heard from heaven, as with Moses and the at Jesus baptism. But this is not usual.

Since Jesus was God in the flesh, we consider that God spoke directly to us through Jesus, like in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). For example, these phrases are from that message:

*Blessed are the peacemakers
Let your light shine
This is how you should pray, ‘Our Father’
Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you
Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness
Do not worry about tomorrow
Do to others what you would have them do to you*

God also speaks INDIRECTLY in the Bible

God speaks **indirectly** when a prophet reports to us what he was told by God. For example, the Prophet Zechariah in 4:8,

“Then the Word of the Lord came to me...”

From that we recognize that God was speaking to Zechariah at that time. God gave him a message encouraging Governor Zerubbabel, and prophesying the completion of the temple rebuilding project in Jerusalem. Some of that message was specific to the governor, but some of it can be applied to us today. For example, the message in verse 6 says,

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty,”

a thought that is very encouraging to Christians today, and in fact, some sing it in a song. This way, we are indirectly hearing God's voice and encouraged.

God's word is often IMPLIED

Speaking through goodness and truth. God's voice is implied in some parts of the Bible. For example, when we read the wisdom presented in Proverbs and advice in letters of the New Testament, we hear God's voice speaking through the goodness and truth of the words.

God's word expressed through examples. God's messages also come to us in the lessons we absorb from considering the lives of Bible characters. We see how their actions succeed or fail as they follow or disobey God's word (1 Corinthians 10:11, James 5:10, Hebrews 11-12:3).

Warts and all. The Bible includes patriarchs and prophets that Muslims have heard about. Not everything the Bible says about them is flattering, and this can be upsetting to Muslims. Some Muslims even think all patriarchs/prophets were sinless. Reading these events in the Bible gives them an unpleasant surprise. They can feel indignant, like we are insulting their grandparents.

For example, the stories of Lot and his daughters, and David's adultery show heroes of both Muslim and Christian faiths caught in vile sin. The Bible is based in reality, so it records the truth about God's people, as the English saying goes, "warts and all!"

Islam says Muslims are to follow everything Mohammed said and did. (See *Lesson on What makes a True Prophet?*) You can see the problem the Bible's realistic approach creates for people expecting to follow a prophet's behavior. They suspect the Bible is telling us that such behavior is good.

Not at all! God wants us to see the results of sin in these people's lives, so that we can learn from their mistakes as well as their successes. And it encourages us that if God loves and can use sinners like them, he can use us.

Translations of the Bible and the Qur'an

In our current era we are blessed with many translations of the Bible and the Qur'an. This enables us to find just the right wording for a culture and educational level. However, having many options can be confusing to Muslims, because they are used to a single wording in the Arabic Qur'an.

(Note: Although Muslims claim a single wording of the Qur'an today, you should know that the Qur'an has actually changed many times over history. According to their own sources, Caliph Uthman burnt any Qur'an which varied from his. Even today, two versions are in use, although the version most commonly in use in America are the 1924 Cairo edition.)

Are there Many Bibles?

Many translations do not mean many Bibles. We hear, "There is only one Qur'an, but you have so many Bibles! How do you know which one is correct?"

In the video, Dr. C demonstrates many types of Bibles. She explains that different methods of packaging the Bible, with commentary in different sizes and colors, does not mean many Bibles. She points out that there are also many versions of the Qur'an in English, similarly ranging from old fashioned to modern English.

Discussing Bible translations and understanding their relationship to Muslim claims and criticism, is very important for those from Islam or working with Muslims. In Islam, the Qur'an only really counts as the Qur'an if it is read in Arabic. As we discuss in other lessons, it is believed that the very words have power. (See also the lesson and study guide for *The Bible and the Qur'an*.)

An important difference to understand, is that with the Bible **it is the message that matters. That message is the same in any language.** Since Christians know it is the message of the Bible that has power, we like to have it translated into whatever language and dialect that it will best penetrate directly to the heart of the reader. There are many subcultures of English speakers. That is why we have so many English translations.

(Note: there are a few books in the Catholic Bible between the Old and New Testaments that are not accepted as Scripture by Protestants or Jews. Otherwise all three groups use the same Old Testament, and Protestants and Catholics use the same New Testament.)

Arabic Translations of the Bible. Huda asks if there is more than one translation of the Bible into Arabic? Dr. C tells her yes, and demonstrates several examples, explaining that some translations are easier for Arabs of Christian background, and others for Arabs of Muslim background. A bilingual version of the Bible in Arabic and English is *Al Kitab al Hyat*, the Book of Life.

Strategic translations of the Qur'an. Be aware however of a significance difference between modern translations of the Bible versus modern translations of the Qur'an.

Modern translations of the Bible in English aim to simplify and clarify. Newer translations of the Qur'an into English however, rather than clarify, tend to soften the controversial passages, for example: on jihad, wife-beating, and sex slaves, etc. The older translations of the Qur'an, such as Pickthall, tend to be more accurate in those passages. As Brother E, a Palestinian evangelist says,

"If Americans knew what the Qur'an really says in Arabic, they would never convert to Islam!"

The Bible is Written in Several Styles

Is the Bible really written in different styles? Yes. Does this help us to understand why it is different from the Qur'an? Yes!

In learning about the Bible, especially if coming from a Muslim background, it is helpful to know that the Bible is written in several styles. The Qur'an is mostly in one style. At times the styles of the Bible reflect the character of the author, their background, culture, or first language.

The Bible also includes what we would call different *genres* of literature, meaning different classes of writing. Some of the Bible is poetry, some proverbs, meaning wise sayings, some parables, prophecy, warnings, some history, theology, biography, and advice for living.

What Former Muslim Huda Likes about the Bible (Arabic with subtitles)

Former Muslim Huda tells us what she likes about the Bible in her heart language of Arabic. It is a reality clip of her summarizing what she has learned about the Bible after a day of lessons. Even though this website is primarily English, we decided to subtitle and present it to you, since we are told it is touching and powerful to see her, a new believer from a Muslim background, explaining her new understanding of Christian principles.

You will notice she discusses how wonderful the Bible is. She likes being able to take it everywhere and not to needing to store it in a special place. She does not need to cover her hair or be ritually pure. She can read it any time. She feels that it is easy to read and understand. Huda appreciates that the Bible collects the writings of many prophets, not just one, like the Qur'an has. With all Huda likes about the Bible, she is glad to read it every day!

(Note that some of what Huda discusses is covered in the *Lesson on the Bible and the Qur'an*.)

Scripture References:

II Corinthians 5:17
2 Peter 1:20,21
Galatians 1:8
Exodus 20:1
Isaiah 43:1
Jeremiah 1:4,11,13 & 31:1,3,15,16 & 16:1
Zechariah 4:8,6
1 Corinthians 10:11
James 5:10
Hebrews 11-12:3
I Timothy 6:17
Genesis 19:36
2 Samuel 11
Psalms
Proverbs
Daniel 10

Qur'an references:

The Fatiha – Surah 1
The Bismallah - Surah 2:1
The Clot – Surah 96

Bonus Material: Mohammed's revelations of the Qur'an

During the month of Ramadan in the year 610 A.D., according to Muslim sources, Gabriel appeared to Mohammed while he was in a cave outside of Mecca. Mohammed, at that time 40 years old, had a good reputation in the community. He was married to one wife, a business woman 15 years his senior, and was apparently faithful to her. Occasionally he would go to this cave to meditate.

Iqra! "Recite!" was the first word, a command, that was spoken to Mohammed by the angel. It has become the legendary first word of the Qur'an. The word means both "read" and "recite," but in this context is usually taken to mean recite, in that Mohammed is believed to have been illiterate. Then he was commanded to recite Surah 96.

Meeting with the angel was not a pleasant experience for Prophet Mohammed. He was afraid, and unsure if he had met an angel or a demon. And he was not sure what he should do about it. He shared what happened with his wife, Khadijah. She decided that his revelation must have been from God because Mohammed was a good man. They then consulted another relative, a nominal Christian, who agreed that Mohammed saw an angel from God, and was a prophet.

There is no indication that they applied guidance from Galatians 1:8, but then the Bible was not available in Arabic at that time.

This first revelation, Surah 96, is known as *The Clot*. If science had been known then, this message would have defied the truth requirement for prophets, since it claims that humans were made from a coagulated blood clot, which is not true. Although this first surah sounds odd to Christians, in that it was primarily targeted against Abu Jahl, an opponent of Mohammed; there was nothing in it directly contradictory to Christianity, as would follow in revelations over the next 22 years.

Fear is a typical reaction the Bible describes when someone is visited by an angel. The angel tells them not to be afraid. But there is no example of someone thinking that they might have been visited by a demon when it was a holy angel.

Perhaps Daniel 10 is one of the best Biblical accounts of an angel appearing and explaining a prophecy which ends up in the Bible. But even here the revelation is not given as a dictation. Knowledge is given to Daniel, and he later records it in the book of the Bible that bears his name.

(Note: Some Muslim proponents speaking to the West, especially on university campuses, interpret “Iqra!” differently. They say, “Islam encourages reading and education. The first word of the Qur’an is *iqra* – ‘read!’”)

While studying Arabic and attending Muslim meetings Dr. C found this claim confusing. She had heard that *iqra* meant *recite*. Then she learned that the word could be translated both ways in English. So, it seems we either don’t know the way it was originally intended to be used with Mohammed, or people choose the meaning that suits them at the time.)

Study Questions:

1. Both Mohammed and Joseph Smith claimed to receive revelation from angels. But the revelations they received were overall contradictory to the previously inspired Word of God. Read Galatians 1:8 and comment on how you think this might, or might not, apply in the two examples given here.
2. In your own words, how would you explain to a Muslim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, when each book or chapter does not start out with the *Bismallah*, the formula claim they have come to expect.
3. What would you say to a Muslim who tells you that since you are not reading the words of the Bible in their original language, that it is not truly the Word of God?
4. Can you explain Biblical inspiration in your own words?
5. Give specific examples from Scripture of God speaking:
 - Directly
 - Indirectly
 - Implied
6. This study guide explains two special forms of materialism which attract Muslims, especially from the Arab Gulf region (also known as the Persian Gulf).
 - What are they?
 - Can you understand the temptations they would present?
 - How do they compare to materialism you have seen in America or Europe?
 - What kind of materialism most attracts you? Have you successfully resisted it?

7. What Bible translation do you prefer? Do you find it more confusing or more of a blessing having so many English translations of the Bible available?

8. If a holy book begins with a claim to be speaking words from God, does that impress you more, less, or the same as a holy book which does not start out with that claim?

9. Food for thought: We can't know for sure, but do you think an angel of some kind might have visited Mohammed? Given that there was limited access to the Bible in those days, and none in Arabic, how do you think Mohammed should have processed his first angelic visitation?

by Christian from Muslim, 2019
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