

Episode 15

Host: My dear viewers. You're most welcome to a new episode of our program "Questions About Faith". We are extremely pleased to renew our sessions with you, and also to answer your questions. It is also our pleasure and honor to have with us Father Zakaria Botros. You are most welcome.

Fr. Zakaria: Thank you.

Host: We have had several interviews before. I will just be giving headlines of the topics so that the viewers could follow. We talked about the fact that God is triune and not three gods, the incarnation of God in the man Jesus Christ, and the truth that Jesus was crucified for the redemption and salvation of mankind. Today Father we arrive at a very important topic, it involves so many critical questions which are frequently asked about the Bible, and the distortion of the Bible. Our Muslim friends everywhere accuse the Bible of having been distorted. Before we get into those questions and talk about this subject would you please acquaint the viewers of what the Bible is? Please go ahead.

Fr Zakaria: Thank you. This is truly a core question, it's an important topic and it is the object of so many questions. You just go and talk to any Muslim brother, he would say "No your Book is distorted" and that's what obliges me to cite the Quran, because this is what he believes. When we try to clarify or cite or prove anything I have to say the Quran states this, and the Quran states that. There is also another question that comes to the mind of the Muslim which is "You're now quoting the Quran, I wonder do you believe in it?" I mean to say that

before talking about the Bible. I would tell him: “Had I believed in the Quran this would not be my position or attire.” Instead of black I would dress in white, and instead of the black head-dress, it would have been green. I’m rather quoting the verses that you believe because if I quote verses from the Bible, you will tell me it has been distorted and my evidence has to be acceptable to you. I have to quote the verses that you believe. This does not mean however that I believe them. Is that clear? This was only a highlight. As to the Holy Bible, this is our Holy Bible, simply it is the Word of God to mankind. It is the message of God to each and everyone of us, the dealings of God throughout history. The Bible is divided into two parts. This part we call the Old Testament, which includes the Torah, the Zabour and the prophets, and this is the New Testament, it includes the four gospels and epistles and the book of Revelation. It includes the Acts of the Apostles too. So this is the Old Testament and this is the New Testament. This is what the Jews believe but why do we believe it also, because we believe that Judaism was an introduction to the coming of Christ. It is full of prophecies, full of symbols, about the person of Christ, that’s why we combine both together. But the Bible in general is the Word of God living and life-giving, and is a personal message to each and everyone of us, to me and to you because the love of God is revealed in it. If you are to place a thread that connects this cover to that one, it would be called 'love'. The love of God for mankind. Love in creation, love in providence, love in redemption, love in the preparation to the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. And the Bible is of course inspired by God.

Host: How is that? Because the methods of inspiration you know, according to our beloved Muslims, there is a specific system for inspiration so we would also like to clarify to them how it has been revealed by God.

Fr. Zakaria: To begin with, the fact that the Bible has been inspired by God can be proven from the Bible itself, shall we prove it? In the second epistle of Paul the apostle to Timothy, chapter 3 and verse 16 it says: "All Scripture is God-breathed or inspired by God." It is inspiration by God. Also regarding the Psalms of the prophet David, they're mentioned in second Samuel chapter 23 verses 1 and 2. "The oracle of David son of Jesse", and that's why the Holy Scriptures show us in Second Peter 1: 21 that the Holy Bible in general is inspired by God. It says: "For prophesy never came by the word of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. And herein lies the difference between inspiration in Christianity and inspiration in Islam. Inspiration in Islam says recite, all he's got to do is recite. Gabriel brings him the preserved tablet and commands him to recite. "Recite in the name of your Lord who created" So he recites and it came in small portions. A bit here for this occasion and a bit there for that occasion, and so on, over the span of 22 years. The Holy Scripture is otherwise. The Holy Bible is the revelation of God's salvation to mankind, so the person would be given the book or the message that reveals. The whole of the Gospel according to Matthew was written entirely by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to reveal the salvation of Christ, and likewise are all the parts of the Holy Bible.

Host: Here is a very important question. As a matter of fact all the questions of this time are important. Does the Quran testify of the Bible that it is inspired by God?

Father Zakaria: Yes, this is also an important question. We've said that the Bible testifies of itself that it is inspired by God, and we cited the verses that explain that. Now it remains to check if the Quran testifies that the Bible is inspired by God or not. In fact in Surah 5 verse 44 it says: "We have sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. The prophets judge by means of it." So the Torah contains guidance and light. And in Surah 2 verse 87 it says, "We gave Moses the book and followed him up with messengers. Later on, We gave Issa the Son of Mariam evidence and assisted Him with the Holy Spirit". So here again Moses, We gave him the book inspired by God you find this also in Surah 6: 92, Surah 17 verse 2, Surah 23: 49 and so many others to the effect that the Torah of Moses is inspired by God. O.K., there is also the Zabur which is the Psalms of David. It also occurs in the Quran that it's inspired by God. In Surah 17 it says "We have given David the Psalms", the Psalms is Zabur and in Surah 4 verse 163 and in Surah 35 verse 25. So this is as far as the Torah and the Psalms are concerned and the books of the prophets as well. In Surah 4 : 163 it says "We have inspired you just as We inspired Noah and the prophets and the prophets following him and as we inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the patriarchs and Jesus, Job and Jonah, Aaron and Solomon and just as We gave David the Psalms.". ***This is a further confirmation.*** Yes, that's all the books of the Old Testament are

inspired by God. Now the Injeel, the New Testament. Does the Quran mention that it is inspired by God? ***Yes this is also important.*** Certainly. In Surah 5 verse 46 it says “We had Issa the Son of Mariam follow in their footsteps in order to confirm what had come before Him from the Torah and we gave Him the Gospel which contains guidance and light. We gave Him the Gospel which contains guidance and light.” The same is also in Surah 5 verse 47, and Surah 57 verse 27

O.K., are there any verses that talk about the whole Bible in general? ***The Torah and the Injeel?*** The Torah, the Injeel, the Psalms and the whole lot as a book inspired by God?

Fr. Zakaria: In Surah 49: 46 it says the following: “Do not argue with the people of the Book”, that’s the Book in its entirety. “unless it is in the politest manner. Say we believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you. So the book is what? ***Sent down here and sent down also there.*** Sent down by God.

Again in Surah 2 verse 146 it says: “Those to whom We have given the Book recognize it just as they recognize their own children. We have given the book that is the Christians and the Jews. They know it as they know their own children. That is well acquainted with it. This is all evidence that the Torah has been inspired by God, that the Zabur has been inspired by God, and that the Injeel has been inspired by God.

Host: Again we return to another important question, is the concept of inspiration in Christianity one and the same?

Fr Zakaria: You mean one and the same as in Islam? You mean exactly the same as in Islam?

Host: Yes I mean the concept of inspiration here and there. Is it the same?

Fr. Zakaria: No I don't think so. Inspiration in Christianity is that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Inspiration in Islam however, as in Surah 85 verses 21 and 22 is "Still it is a majestic Quran preserved on a guarded tablet." So it has already been written, do you see my point? And it says in Surah 96 verse 1 "Read in the name of your Lord who creates, so Mohamed's role consists in only reading the words that had already been written from eternity past in the preserved tablet. But with us, as we have mentioned, inspiration in the second epistle of Peter chapter 1 verse 21 is that prophesy never came by the will of man, not from a man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives them understanding, imparts them knowledge, enlightens their hearts and shines in them and inspires their minds so as to express in their own words the divine inspiration, the divine mind, the divine meaning,

Host: This also takes us to another question our Muslim brothers ask, why have you got more than one gospel?

Fr. Zakaria: Well in fact we need to correct this misunderstanding for our beloved Muslims. In fact we believe in one Gospel, and you'll see that in a moment. In the gospel according to Mark, chapter 1 verses 14 and 15 it says, Christ Himself says "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel". One Gospel. The same is emphasized in Matthew 4 verse 23 about Christ that "He went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues preaching the gospel of the kingdom". Not gospels, one gospel. And in

Romans, chapter 1 and verse 16 Paul the apostle says:
“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation” The Gospel, one Gospel
What does gospel mean? What does it mean?

Good news, good news, a happy news. It is a single happy news, that God loves you, God provided for your salvation, the gate of heaven has been opened, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest.” It is one good news one gospel.

Host: Perhaps Reverend Father this happens when they hear us without understanding, when we say the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of John, the gospel of Luke, so it seems to them as though they are separate gospels.

Fr. Zakaria : Right.

Host: So would you explain to them that it is one whole unit please Reverend Father.

Fr. Zakaria: You put it correctly and that’s truly their objection when we say the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, the gospel of Luke. The word gospel as we mentioned is good news, Matthew for example was writing for the Jews so he was telling them about the good news. He took the good news of Jesus Christ and went and preached it and wrote them a book, a good news. Mark addressed himself to the Romans, and sent them the good news. This good news has been written by somebody so we still call it good news or what else?

Luke addressed himself to the Greeks, he sent them good news, it is the same good news and John as well addressed himself to the entire world. But if I put these 4 good news in an Islamic style using Islamic terminology I would say it is one Gospel in four letters (ahruf), because they believe that the Quran is one in seven letters correct?

What's that business about the Quran being in seven letters? Yes. What does it mean?

Fr. Zakaria: O.K., let me tell you something. Abu Jaafar El Nahhas in his book, 'Al Nasekh Wal Mansoukh' - 'The Abrogating and the Abrogated' says the following. It is to be understood from the forefathers of the nation - that is the ancient folks and the best mullahs, that the Quran was revealed in seven letters. That the Quran was revealed in seven letters means that it was revealed in seven tongues, and it was commanded to be recited in seven tongues, owing to the difference of vocabulary and the agreement of the meaning.

Host: This needs clarification Father.

Fr. Zakaria: It means that the meaning is the same, that is of the Quran, but the vocabulary used in the expression is different, so they called this expression a letter, and that expression a letter, and that expression a letter, and later we'll get to explain where all this originated from. It is an established narration about Omar Ibn el Khattab and Abdullah Ibn Massoud and Abu Ibn Ka3b that they disputed about the Quran. They had a sort of a contest. Some of them disagreed with the others in the same recitation, who's telling us this? Abu Jaafar El Nahhas in his book "The Abrogating And The Abrogated Verses". They found themselves at loggerheads. One used a vocabulary, and the other one used another vocabulary, and they appealed to the prophet for a decision. They went to him, so each man sat down then he corrected each one of them in his recitation, as different as it was. One would recite, the prophet would correct him, yet the recitation stayed different. All were different from one another, until some of them started to doubt what he has corrected them. Well, I am different from him and he's

different from me, and all of us are different. Why is it like that? They started to doubt then the messenger of God said - may God's peace and prayer be upon him - to those among them who doubted, when he corrected them all. What did he say? Listen well to the following "God has surely commanded me to recite the Quran in seven letters, and this is where the seven letters come in. This is a quote from Abu Jaafar El Nahhas, and this expression of "in seven letters" occurs in a divine tradition, well you know that there is a difference between the prophetic tradition and the divine tradition. Divine traditions are words of God narrated through Mohamed and so forth. This has been reported by Sheikh Jalal el Din Abdul Rahman El Seiouty. (الشيخ جلال الدين عبد الرحمن السيوطي) This is a well known scholar in his book "Al Itqan Fi Uloum El Quran", (الإتقان في علوم القرآن) volume 1 page 46 till 51. What does he say there? He said the following: According to the narration of a multitude of companions a multitude means a whole lot of the companions of the messenger and 21 intimate companions 21 friends. Consensus. What did they say? They said that Uthman said from the pulpit, Uthman Ibn Affan said the prophet - may God's prayer and peace be upon him - said God said that the Quran was revealed in seven letters each one of them conclusive and adequate so they all testified to it ***that means all of them are correct***. All of them the seven letters are correct. But what does the term seven letters really mean? Al Seiouty comments on this tradition as follows: "Opinions concerning this tradition differed in as many as 40 statements. Each one had his own statement, because there were all 40 people. That's not too many. They must have been a lot more than that. One - of course I'm not going to narrate the 40 I'm sure that

the viewers don't have time to hear all of them but I will give a snippet just excerpts. One, the signification of the seven letters is seven ways of complimentary meanings expressed in different vocabulary such as for example "draw near" could also be expressed as "come" can also be expressed "hurry up", can also be expressed as "make haste", and can also be expressed "snap to it" but the meaning is the same. Yes, it's all the same then "draw near, come, hurry up, make haste, snap to it" are 7 meanings, I mean 7 vocabularies bearing the same meaning. This is one of the 40 opinions, this has been maintained by Wahb, Sufyan and Al Tabary among others O.K.? Ibn Abdel Barr held that the letters in which the Quran was revealed were generally accepted meanings that sound differently, so the vocabulary is different but the words, I mean the meaning, the way they sound is different. Al Seiouty concludes his research with this statement. "Many among the hoi polloi - that is the masses – have thought that the signification of the seven letters is the seven readings of Uthman's copy, which is an odious ignorance. No, it was not talking about the copy. No, there were seven to go around. Each copy of the Quran had different terms. The meaning was one but one copy expresses that way, and this one has meanings, I mean different vocabulary and so forth, seven – what has happened then?

Sheikh Abu Jaafar Muhamad Ibn Jareer Al Tabary explains in his book "Jame Elbayan Fi Tafseer El Quran" (جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن) volume 1 page 48. What does he say? The difference of the seven letters is a difference of vocabulary with the agreement of meaning. There are seven texts, vocabulary, right? Seven copies, each copy with different vocabulary, yet the meaning is

the same. Al Tabari goes on to say, if someone says why are the other six letters not there anymore? Where are the other 6 muss-hafs? Yes, he will answer now. Although the messenger admitted the seven and commanded them to be committed to memory, for that's a waste of what they've been commanded. A waste. Where are they gone? Those 6 other. I'll tell you, there's a story to it from history, and I believe that the viewer would be interested to know it. Yes, sheikh Abu Ja3afar el Tabari wonders what's the story about that what has happened? And he answers saying that the other 6 letters or copies were left out by Uthman who forbid them to be recited. This occurs in "Jame Elbayan Fi Tafseer El Quran", (جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن) volume 1 page 66. in the Arab encyclopedia on page 1087, in the entry of Uthman Ibn Affan is written: "A vehement opposition had rose against him, that ended up with a rebellion against him and his murder, he was a khalif and the reasons for the rebellion are various, among which was his violation of religion by his burning all the copies except for the copy which he commanded to be circulated.

Host: This is very clear Reverend Father because the messenger himself commanded the seven to be kept but then Uthman burnt them.

Fr. Zakaria: Yes he burnt them.

Host: That's disobedience to the command.

Fr. Zakaria: So did he deserve to be killed or not? Isn't that right? In his book "Jame Elbayan Fi Tafseer El Quran", (جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن) Imam al Tabari explains, also in volume 1 also page 66 saying the reason why Uthman Ibn Affan burned the 6 copies that differed was the disagreement and the in-fighting among the Muslims about which copy had the precedence, for each

group held fast to the copy they had and they were fighting, killing one another so he thought the best thing to do is to gather all the narrators, write it all down in a book, then select one and burn the rest. But of course, couldn't any of those copies that were burnt be the correct one? So how could he have burnt 6? Shouldn't they have been kept? They should have been kept even as expositions of the Quran instead of writing up different expositions. It's a crime because it's quite obvious that the Quran had seven different copies endorsed by Mohamed seven different musshaffs so after all that, would they tell us the Bible you've got in your hands is distorted because it has 4 gospels, not one gospel? So we can say 4 letters, and it's best to keep all of them together instead of burning them and keeping only one.

Host: This could have happened but it's impossible, no way by the Christians.

Fr. Zakaria: This one shows this aspect, that one shows this aspect and that one shows another aspect.

Nahed: Now we have come to our primary question on which depends the understanding of all our Muslim brothers. There are Quranic verses accusing the Bible of having been altered. We have now mentioned the Quranic verses that bear witness to the Bible but there are other verses accusing it of distortion. What do you think?

Fr. Zakaria: This is correct. This is a fact that there are verses in the Quran that accuse the Injeel of distortion. Among them is Surah 2 verse 75 which says "Are you so keen for them to believe for your own sake, while a group of them have already heard God's Word, then they

tamper with it, once they have studied it and they realize it”.

Let's see what El Baydawy says about what this means. He says, “Are you so keen that the Jews would believe you, while a group of their forefathers have already heard God's words - that's the Torah, then they would tamper with it." This is what he gives as an exposition that is they would construe it and interpret it as they wish not to change the vocabulary and words but the meaning. No they just interpret it, just interpretation. They have not changed the original. Yes. There is one further remark on this verse. The verse says 'a group' while a group of them that is not all of them. There was just one group, so the other groups held on to the original that means that the original was there. Right or wrong? Here is another observation: He says they hear the Word of God then tamper with it, so the words of God were there but they tampered with the meaning. They distorted the understanding, right? Because it says 'They heard the words of God.' and the words of God by the testimony of the Quran are well established. A further observation, the part that says 'once they have studied it' they tamper with it once they have studied it. 'Studied it' means they knew what was right they understood the original so the original was there, was not distorted, yet they tampered with the understood meaning, no more and no less.

Host: O.K. Are there other verses?

Fr. Zakaria: Plenty of them.

Host: Because there is little time left in the program, would you please mention one verse only, and what it means?

Fr. Zakaria: As you say. O.K. Surah 4 verse 46, "Some persons who are Jews distort words out of their context,

and say we have heard and disobeyed, and hear without listening or lead us on twisting their tongues around, and stabbing at religion as if they had really said we have heard and obeyed and hear and watch over us which would be better for them and more straightforward. However, God has cursed them for their disbelief since only a few believe". This verse certainly needs to be clarified.

Host: Well of course our conversation has not ended at this point, and of course this requires a lot of clarification, and the Lord willing we will continue in another episode. Our time is only enough to show our gratitude to you Father for these clarifications, and Lord willing, we'll have many more sessions.

Fr. Zakaria: Amen.

Host: Dear viewer, it is our utmost pleasure to receive any of your questions and answer them and it is our pleasure to send you a Bible at your request. Thank you, till we meet again.

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