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DOES GOD PRESERVE SCRIPTURE?

'For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished' (Matt. 5:18).

A COMMON (WRONG) ANSWER: NO.

I remember as a young Christian going along to a debate between a Christian speaker and a Muslim speaker. The debate was interesting, but after a while it became clear that the speakers were talking past one another. The Christian speaker tried to back up the things he was saying by quoting from the Bible. But the Muslim speaker responded that the text of the Bible had been corrupted, and so it was inadmissible as evidence in the discussion.

At one point, the Muslim speaker even quoted the Bible to make *his* point. He read out Jeremiah 8:8:

How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie.

He waved his finger with a triumphant flourish: 'Even the *Bible* says that the text of the Bible has been corrupted!'

I have heard this argument from Muslims many times. It is a common teaching of Islam that, while much of the Bible was indeed given as a revelation from Allah (God), the text has become corrupted over time, and additions have been made that were not original. So, the conclusion is that God has not preserved the Bible, in the way that he has preserved the Qur'ān.

There are two immediate problems with this view as commonly held by Muslims. First, in Jeremiah 8:8, the prophet is *condemning* the scribes who change the text of the Bible to suit themselves. We'll see later that there's plenty of evidence, even within the Book of Jeremiah itself, that other scribes copied and kept the true text of Scripture with painstaking care. Second, the Qur'ān itself has a complex textual history, which is not often known or acknowledged by Muslims. There's no easy comparison to be made between a supposedly pure text of the Qur'ān and a corrupt text of the Bible.⁴

Apart from the specific issues raised by Islam, others in our day deny that God has preserved the Bible. There

As Gregory R. Lanier explains, in another volume in this series, the Islamic doctrine of tahrif al-nass teaches that Jews and Christians have intentionally corrupted the text of Scripture. This idea is loosely rooted in certain verses of the Qur'an (2:75, 5:13, and 5:41). It was then more clearly developed by later writers such as al-Mahdi (744/5-785), Ibn Qutayba (828-889), and Ibn Kathir (1301-1373).



Gregory R. Lanier, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to How We Got the Bible* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2018), 90.

are three main arguments: (1) some suggest that certain books have been 'lost'; (2) others contend that the text of the Bible has been changed deliberately, and so we can't know what it originally said: this is a bit like the Muslim argument introduced above; (3) still others argue that the original text of the Bible has simply been lost to us through the natural processes of texts decaying and disappearing, and through unintentional errors being made in copying. We'll consider these briefly here.

(1) Following the publication of Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* many have accepted the idea—presented in the book as a sort of 'conspiracy theory'—that the Bible was changed by the Roman authorities after the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire. At the very least, some suggest, certain books which might have been included in the Bible were suppressed from that time.

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