

THE PRESERVATION OF QURAN

Samuel Green

Introduction

When Christians and Muslims talk about God the question of the preservation of the Bible and Qur'an often comes up. Christians are regularly told that the Bible has been corrupted and that only the Qur'an is perfectly preserved. Here is what some Islamic leaders say:

The text of the Qur'an is entirely reliable. It has been as it is, unaltered, unedited, not tampered with in any way, since the time of its revelation. (M. Fethullah Gulen, *Questions this Modern Age Puts to Islam*, London: Truostar, 1993, p.58)

(The Qur'an) was memorised by Mohammed and then dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters (suras) have ever been changed over the centuries. (*Understanding Islam and the Muslims*, The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils Inc. (pamphlet) Nov. 1991)

Unlike earlier scriptures the Qur'an has been preserved unchanged in its original Arabic text since the time of revelation, as God had promised within it. History witnessed the fulfillment of that promise, for the Book of God remains to date exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet and recited by him. Immediately memorized and recorded by large numbers of his companions, it was passed on in exactly the same form by thousands of Muslims generation after generation up until the present day. ... There is only one version of the Qur'an; the same revealed words continue to be read, recited and memorized in their original Arabic language by Muslims throughout the world. (Saheeh International, *Clear Your Doubts About Islam: 50 Answers to Common Questions*, Saudi Arabia: Dar Abul-Qasim, 2008, pp. 28-29)

In summary, Islamic leaders are making the following claims about the Qur'an:

- Muhammad perfectly memorized the Qur'an.
- He simply dictated the Qur'an to his followers who memorised it and wrote it down with no editing. Muhammad examined and approved what was written.
- There is only one version of the Qur'an.
- The Qur'an is perfectly preserved.
- These claims are proved by history.
- The Qur'an is superior to other scriptures in its preservation.

Are these claims true? For the rest of this article we will examine these claims and consult the Hadith, Islamic scholars and compare modern Arabic Qur'ans.

Chapter 1: Did Muhammad perfectly memorise the Qur'an?

No, and the Hadith and Qur'an are very clear about this.

Narrated Aisha: The Prophet heard a man reciting the Qur'an in the mosque and said, "May Allah bestow His Mercy on him, as he has reminded me of such-and-such verses of such a Surah." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 556; also *Sahih Muslim* bk. 4, no. 1720)

Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: ... (Muhammad said) I am only a human being and I forget just as you do; so when I forget, remind me ... (*Sunan Abu Dawud*: bk. 3, no. 1015; also *Sahih al-Bukhari*:

vol. 1, bk. 8, no. 394)

We will make you recite, [O Muhammad], and you will not forget, except what Allah should will ... (Qur'an 87:6-7, Saheed International)

We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it ... (Qur'an 2:106, Saheed International)

Therefore Muslim leaders are exaggerating when they say Muhammad memorised the Qu'ran perfectly.

Chapter 2: Did Muhammad simply recite the Qur'an with no editing?

Again the answer is no. The Hadith is very clear that sometimes Muhammad would say a verse and then say it again with an edited version.

Narrated Al-Bara: There was revealed:

“Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah.” (Qur'an 4.95)

The Prophet said, "Call Zaid for me and let him bring the (writing) board, the inkpot and the scapula bone (the pen) ..." Then he said, "Write: 'Not equal are those Believers who sit...'", and at that time 'Amr bin Um Maktum, the blind man was sitting behind the Prophet. He said, "O Allah's Apostle! What is your order for me (as regards the above verse) as I am a blind man?" So, instead of the above verse, the following verse was revealed:

“Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) except those who are disabled and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah.” (Qur'an 4.95)

(*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 512; also *Sahih Muslim*: bk. 20, no. 4676-4677)

Here we see verse 4:95 being edited to now include “except those who are disabled”. This type of change happened so often to the Qur'an that the Meccans used it as a reason to reject Muhammad.

And when We exchange a verse in the place of another verse - and God knows very well what he is sending down - they (the Meccans) say (to Muhammad), "Thou art a mere forger!" (Qur'an 16:101, Arberry)

Therefore, when Muslim leaders say the Qur'an was simply recited by Muhammad and then written down they are wrong. The Islamic history shows that sometimes verses were edited to their final form.

Chapter 3: Did Muhammad have one version of the Qur'an?

Again the answer is no. The Hadith records that Muhammad allowed different versions of the Qur'an.

Narrated Umar bin Al-Khattab: I heard Hisham bin Hakim reciting Surat Al-Furqan during the lifetime of Allah's Apostle and I listened to his recitation and noticed that he recited in several different ways which Allah's Apostle had not taught me. I was about to jump over him during his prayer, but I controlled my temper and when he had completed his prayer, I put his upper garment around his neck and seized him by it and said, "Who taught you this Surat which I heard you reciting?" He replied, "Allah's Apostle taught it to me". I said, "You have told a lie, for Allah's Apostle taught it to me in a different way from yours". So I dragged him to Allah's Apostle and said, "I heard this person reciting Surat Al-Furqan in a way which you haven't taught me!". On that Allah's Apostle said, "Release him (Umar) recite, O Hisham!" Then he recited in the same way I heard him reciting. Then Allah's Apostle said, "It was revealed in this way", and added, "Recite, O Umar", I recited it as he had taught me. Allah's Apostle then said, "It was revealed in this way this

Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways, so recite of it whichever is easier for you." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 514)

Narrated Ibn Mas'ud: I heard a person reciting a (Quranic) verse in a certain way, and I had heard the Prophet reciting the same verse in a different way. So I took him to the Prophet and informed him of that but I noticed the sign of disapproval on his face, and then he said, "Both of you are correct, so don't differ, for the nations before you differed, so they were destroyed." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 4, bk. 56, no. 682)

Umar bin Al-Khattab and Hisham bin Hakim were from the same tribe, therefore, this difference was not just a matter of dialect. Muslim leaders are exaggerating when they say there is only one version of the Qur'an. From the very beginning there were several versions.

Chapter 4: Was the Qur'an collected into one book under Muhammad's supervision?

No. It was his companions who did this. They gathered together material from various sources.

Narrated Zaid bin Thabit: ... Therefore I (Umar) suggest, you (Abu Bakr) order that the Qur'an be collected." I said to 'Umar, "How can you do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?" ... Abu Bakr kept on urging me to accept his idea until Allah opened my chest for what He had opened the chests of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. So I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from (what was written on) palmed stalks, thin white stones and also from the men who knew it by heart, till I found the last verse of Surat At-Tauba (Repentance) with Abi Khuzaima Al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. ... (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 509)

And Muhammad's companions had to discuss among themselves what parts of what Muhammad said were Qur'anic.

Ibn Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: "If there were for the son of Adam a valley full of riches, he would long to possess another one like it, and the son of Adam does not feel satisfied but with dust." And "Allah returns to him who returns (to him). Ibn Abbas said: I do not know whether it is from the Qur'an or not; and in the narration transmitted by Zuhair it was said: I do not know whether it is from the Qur'an, and he made no mention of Ibn Abbas. (*Sahih Muslim*: bk. 5, no. 2285)

Chapter 5: How many collections of the Qur'an were made by the companions of Muhammad?

There were many early collections made by the different companions of Muhammad. Each companion taught his own version to his students and these collections were not identical.

Narrated Ibrahim: The companions of 'Abdullah (bin Mas'ud) came to Abu Darda', (and before they arrived at his home), he looked for them and found them. Then he asked them, "Who among you can recite (Qur'an) as 'Abdullah recites it?" They replied, "All of us." He asked, "Who among you knows it by heart?" They pointed at 'Alqama. Then he asked Alqama. "How did you hear 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud reciting Surat Al-Lail (The Night)?" Alqama recited:

"By the male and the female." (Qur'an 92:3)

Abu Darda said, "I testify that I heard the Prophet reciting it likewise, but these people want me to recite it:

"And by Him Who created male and female." (Qur'an 92:3)

But by Allah, I will not follow them." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 468; also *Sahih Muslim*: bk. 4, no. 1799-1802)

This hadith shows two groups of Muslims arguing over a verse in the Qur'an. One group had learned the Qur'an from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud while the other group from another companion of Muhammad. As you can see the difference was not a matter of dialect but words. We see this again with Ubayy ibn Ka'b.

Narrated Ibn Abbas: Umar said, "Ubayy was the best of us in the recitation (of the Qur'an) yet we leave (out) some of what he recites". Ubayy says, "I have taken it from the mouth of Allah's Apostle and will not leave for anything whatever". ... (Qur'an 2:106). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 527)

Just as several of the disciples of Jesus recorded the Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) so too several of Muhammad's companions recorded the Qur'an. In the early years of Islam there were synoptic Qur'ans.

These different Qur'ans were a subject of study for early Islamic scholars. The Arabic librarian, Ibn Abi Ya'qub al-Nadim, made a famous catalogue of all the books in Arabic in the year 375 A.H./987 A.D. He records seven books which dealt with this topic.

Books Composed about Discrepancies of the [Qur'anic] Manuscripts

1. "The Discrepancies between the Manuscripts of the People of al-Madinah, al-Kufah, and al-Basrah" according to al-Kisa'i.
2. Book of Khalaf, "Discrepancies of the Manuscripts".
3. "Discrepancies of the People of al-Kufah, al-Basrah, and Syria concerning the Manuscripts", by al-Farra.
4. "Discrepancies between the Manuscripts" by Abu Da'ud al-Sijistani.
5. Book of al-Mada'ini about the discrepancies between the manuscripts and the compiling of the Qur'an.
6. "Discrepancies between the Manuscripts of Syria, al-Hijaz, and al-Iraq", by Ibn `Amir al-Yahsubi.
7. Book of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Isbahani about discrepancies of the manuscripts. (Al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim - A Tenth Century survey of Muslim Culture*, p. 79)

These synoptic Qur'ans had the following differences:

- Different numbers of surahs.
- Surahs were arranged differently.
- Different words for the same verse.

(C)oncerning the arrangement of the Qur'an in the manuscript of Abd Allah ibn Mus'ad, Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan said, "I found in a manuscript of `Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud the surahs of the Qur'an in accordance with the following (different) sequence ... These are one hundred and ten surahs. (Al-Nadim, p. 53)

One of our reliable friends has informed us, saying that the composition of the surahs according to the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b is in a village called Qariyat al-Ansar, two parasangs from al-Basrah, where in his home Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik al-Ansari showed us a Qur'anic manuscript, saying, "This is the copy of Ubayy Which we have, handed down from our fathers." I looked into it and ascertained the headings of the surahs, the endings of the revelations, and the numbers of verses. ... one hundred and sixteen surahs. (Al-Nadim, pp. 58-61)

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's version of the Qur'an did not have surahs 1, 113 or 114, that is, there were no du'a prayers. Ubayy ibn Ka'b's Qur'an is reported to have these two extra surahs.

Surah 115 al-Khal: O Allah, we seek your help and ask your forgiveness, and we praise you and we don't disbelieve in you. We separate from and leave who sins against you.

Surah 116 al-Hafd: O Allah we worship you and to you we pray and prostrate and to you we run and hasten to serve you. We hope for your mercy and fear your punishment. Your punishment will surely reach the disbelievers. (Ahmed von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1985, p. 48)

Some remnants of these different early Qur'ans have recently been discovered.

The San'ani specimens are, however, not only proofs of their existence, but allow for the hypothesis that even more arrangements were in use which differed from the official sequence as well as from those reported to go back to Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy. In one case, the end of Surah 26 is followed by the beginning of Surah 37 (on the same page, of course!), which corresponds exactly with the leap reported about Ibn Mas'ud's arrangement. (Gerd-R Puin, "Observations on the Early Qur'an Manuscripts in San'a'", in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 111)

The main significance of the San'a 1 (Standford 07) manuscript is that its lower text does not belong to this Uthmanic textual tradition. In this sense, it is "non-Uthmanic." It belongs to some other textual tradition which is designated here as C-1. (Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'an of the Prophet", *Arabica* 57, 2010, p. 344)

Chapter 6: What happened to all of these early different Qur'ans?

These early synoptic Qur'ans were not preserved. The differences between these Qur'ans led to arguments.

"The Syrians," we are told, "contended with the Iraqis, the former following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, the latter that of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, each accusing the other of unbelief" (Labib as-Said, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version*, tr. B. Weis, et al., Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1975, p. 23)

The third caliph, Uthman solved this political problem by authorising one version of the Qur'an and destroying the others.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: Hudhaifa bin Al-Yaman came to Uthman at the time when the people (Muslims) of Syria and the people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Armenia and Azarbaijan. Hudhaifa was afraid of their (the people of Syria and Iraq) differences in the recitation of the Qur'an, so he said to 'Uthman, "O chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Quran) as Jews and the Christians did before." So 'Uthman sent a message to Hafsa saying, "Send us the manuscripts of the Qur'an so that we may compile the Qur'anic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you." Hafsa sent it to 'Uthman. 'Uthman then ordered Zaid bin Thabit, 'Abdullah bin Az-Zubair, Said bin Al-As and 'AbdurRahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. 'Uthman said to the three Quraishi men, "In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Qur'an, then write it in the dialect of Quraish, the Qur'an was revealed in their tongue." They did so, and when they had written many copies, 'Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. 'Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. ...(*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 510)

This is how there came to be one Qur'an today; the other versions made by the companions of Muhammad were destroyed. A simple comparison would be if the early Christians destroyed the Gospel

according to Mark, Luke and John and just kept Matthew. It may make things simpler but Christianity is richer for having preserved all of these books and Islam is poorer for destroying the testimony of these companions of Muhammad.

Chapter 7: Did all of the companions of the Muhammad agree with Uthman's actions?

Again no, in particular Abdullah ibn Mas'ud objected to Uthman's actions. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was one of the great reciters of the Qur'an.

Narrated Masruq: ... I heard the Prophet saying, "Take (learn) the Qur'an from four (men): 'Abdullah bin Masud, Salim, Mu'adh and Ubai bin Ka'b." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 521)

He even recited the Qur'an to Muhammad.

Narrated Abdullah bin Masud: The Prophet said to me, "Recite Quran to me." I said to him. "Shall I recite (it) to you while it has been revealed to you?" He said, "I like to hear it from another person." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 576)

However, when Uthman made his version of the Qur'an Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was not consulted. Abdullah was angry about this and also angry that Uthman wanted him to destroy his version of the Qur'an. Abdullah told his students to hide their Qur'ans from Uthman.

'Abdullah (b. Mas'ud) reported that he said to his companions to conceal their copies of the Qur'an and further said: He who conceals anything he shall have to bring that which he had concealed on the Day of Judgment, and then said: After whose mode of recitation do you command me to recite? I in fact recited before Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) more than seventy chapters of the Qur'an and the Companions of Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) know it that I have better understanding of the Book of Allah (than they do), and if I were to know that someone had better understanding than I, I would have gone to him. Shaqiq said: I sat in the company of the Companions of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) but I did not hear anyone having rejected that (that is, his recitation) or finding fault with it. (*Sahih Muslim*: bk. 31, no. 6022; also *Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 522)

Az-Zuhri also narrated that Abdullah Ibn Mas'oud became upset because he was not chosen to copy the Qur'an. He said, "Oh you Muslims, how can I not be chosen ... Ibn Mas'oud also said, "Oh people of Iraq! Hide your Qurans in your homes (from Uthman)." (*Sunan Al-Tirmithi*, Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiah, 2008, vol. 4, no. 3105, p. 134; also Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, vol. 2 p. 444)

Therefore not all the companions of Muhammad agreed with Uthman's actions but Uthman was able to enforce his decision and so these other early Qur'ans were destroyed. Thus today we only have the Uthmanic Qur'an.

Chapter 8: Is the Uthmanic Qur'an complete?

Again the answer is no. There is ample evidence throughout the Hadith of authentic Qur'anic material not included in Uthman's Qur'an.

... We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) Bara'at (surah 9). I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill

the stomach of the son of Adam but dust” ... (*Sahih Muslim*, bk. 5, no. 2286)

... Allah sent Muhammad (saw) with the Truth and revealed the Holy Book to him, and among what Allah revealed, was the verse of the Rajam (the stoning of married persons, male and female, who commit adultery) and we did recite this verse and understood and memorized it. Allah’s Apostle (saw) did carry out the punishment of stoning and so did we after him. I am afraid that after a long time has passed, somebody will say, ‘By Allah, we do not find the verse of the Rajam in Allah’s Book’, and thus they will go astray by leaving an obligation which Allah has revealed. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 8, bk. 82, no. 817)

This surah about the son of Adam and the verse about stoning for adultery are not in the Uthmanic Qur’an which is the modern Qur’an.

Chapter 9: Are all the ancient Uthmanic Qur’an manuscripts identical to the modern Qur’an?

No, see answering-islam.org/PQ/A1.htm#AppendA for a comprehensive study of one such manuscript.

Chapter 10: Are all Arabic Qur’ans used in the world today identical?

Again no. When Uthman made his Qur’an the Arabic script did not include the vowel markings or the dots used to distinguish between certain letters. This ambiguity of the text allowed the words to be formed in different ways and today there are different versions of the Uthmanic Qur’an which have the words constructed differently.

There are ten such different Qur’ans accepted today. The two main versions (qira’at) are the Qur’an according to Imam Hafs (the most common) and the Qur’an according to Imam Warsh (North Africa). Here are two examples of their differences.

The Qur’an According to Imam Hafs	The Qur’an According to Imam Warsh
<p>تَقُولُونَ taquluna ... you (plural) say ... 2:140</p>	<p>يَقُولُونَ yaquluna ... they say ...</p>
<p>There are different letters at the beginning of these words. This difference changes the meaning from “you” to “they”.</p>	

The Qur’an According to Imam Hafs	The Qur’an According to Imam Warsh
<p>قَالَ qaala He (Muhammad) said, “My lord knows ...” 21:4</p>	<p>قُل qul Say: My lord knows ...</p>
<p>The difference here changes the subject of the verb. In the Hafs Qur’an the subject is Muhammad but in the Warsh Qur’an the subject is God.</p>	

There are approximately 1354 small differences between these two Qur’ans. But there is another difference between them - the Basmalah.

The Basmalah is the phrase, "In the Name of Allah, the Ever-Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy". Both the Hafs and Warsh Qur'ans have the Basmalah printed at the start of every sura except sura 9, however, in the Hafs Qur'an it is part of the revelation of each surah while in the Warsh Qur'an it is not.

The scholars who claim that the *basmalah* at the beginning of the *soorahs* is a verse of the Qur'aan, (include) Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee (d. 204 A.H.) (and) Imaam Ahmad (d. 241) ... However, those that do not hold the *basmalah* at the beginning of the *soorahs* to be a part of the Qur'aan (include) Imaam Maalik (d. 179) (and) Aboo Haneefah (d. 150 A.H.) ... (T)he qira'at (the Readers) themselves differ over whether the basmalah was a verse in Soorah al-Faatihah and the other soorahs. Among the Qaarees (the Readers), Ibn Katheer, 'Aasim and al-Kisaa'ee were the only ones who considered it to be a verse at the beginning of each soorah, whereas the others did not. (Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan*, pp. 157-158.)

The Basmalah appears 113 times at the start of the surahs and has 4 words which means there are 452 extra words in the Qur'an according to Imam Hafs than the Qur'an of according to Imam Warsh.

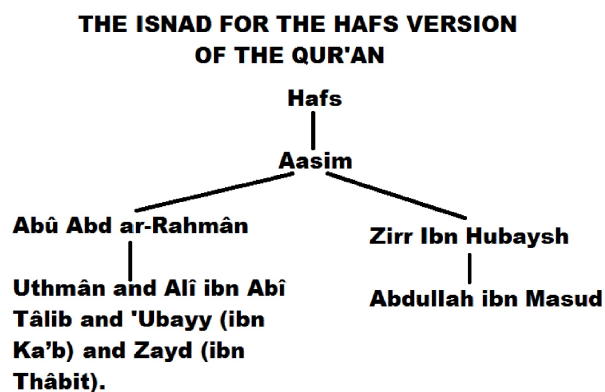
For more information see answering-islam.org/Green/seven.htm

Chapter 11: Does the chain of narration for the modern Qur'an guarantee it is authentic?

No. The different Qur'ans, like hadiths, have a chain of narration (isnad) as proof of their authenticity.

The diagram to the right is the chain of narration for the most common Qur'an, the Hafs Qur'an. However, examining this chain shows that it is not reliable because it claims that Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b recited the Qur'an this way, and as we have seen in chapters 5, 6 and 7 this is not the case.

Therefore the chain of narration is no guarantee for the authenticity of the Qur'an.



<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Qiraat/hafs.html#4>

Conclusion

When Christians and Muslims talk about God the question of the preservation of the Bible and Qur'an often comes up. Islamic writers claim there is only one Qur'an, that it was memorised perfectly by Muhammad and his followers, that it has never been changed or edited but simply passed down to us today. However, we have now considered the evidence and found that these claims are either false or exaggerations.

We have seen that Muhammad sometimes forgot verses of the Qur'an, edited verses into their final form, allowed several versions of the Qur'an and never made an authorised version himself. His companions made their own collections and these were different. Uthman authorised one version of the Qur'an and destroyed the other collections. Even today there are different Arabic versions of the Qur'an used around the world.

In view of these things we ask Muslims to think again about the Qur'an before they dismiss the Bible.

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