

A Christian's Guide to the Koran, Lesson 10, **Whence the Koran?**

It was the early seventh century. There was this 40-year-old Arabian man sitting in a mountain cave outside the city of Mecca. He was meditating. On what we cannot imagine. Suddenly the man saw a flash of light. A voice then commanded him to read [or recite, read aloud] something. He replied that he was unable to read, for this was the truth. Twice more the voice, which materialized and identified itself as the angel Gabriel, encouraged him to do what seemed impossible, and then gave him the first of many such revelations.

So goes the traditional explanation of the beginnings of the Koran, Muslim's holiest book. The story continues that the frightened man, whom we know of today as Muhammad, ran home to his wife Khadijah, believing that he had heard from an evil spirit. He was shaken thoroughly, and even literally by this angelic visit. Later visits would see him in ever worse physical condition, we are told, as the Messenger from Heaven treats him pretty roughly at times. How different the writers and the writings of the Bible. Yes, Daniel and John, when they saw angels and perhaps Jesus Himself, were a bit shaken, but only because of Who they saw, not what their Visitors did to them!

Khadijah comforted him and called in her cousin, an Ebionite priest, Waraka Ibn Nawfal. Now, the Ebionites were only loosely - by our present standards - called Christians, for, though Jewish, they did believe in the Messiah, Jesus. They also believed it was absolutely necessary to keep Jewish laws and rites. They rejected the writings of Paul as heretical and against the law of God. They were of the sort that Paul preached against passionately in his letters to the Romans and Galatians. He would not have considered them saved brothers and sisters. I will follow his lead on this.

So, to hear that Waraka fully supported Muhammad in his visions, and he most assuredly did, is not the most comforting of thoughts, but it does take the true Christian church away from any guilt in having promoted this new religion.

Waraka was indeed convinced that Muhammad has heard from Heaven. Muhammad was convinced that he had heard from Hell. Strangely, though Muslims believe everything else Muhammad said, they draw the line here. You must be the judge as to what Muhammad heard, if anything. And you can judge his words by the fruit they have produced in the world and in the human heart.

Over a period of 20 plus years the revelations to the "Prophet" [and we cannot deny he was a prophet, though not of the sort the Bible praises] continued, and he slowly began to share them with whomever would listen. There were not too many listeners at first.

There were four ways these revelations came, says the tradition: dreams, revelations in his heart during the day, a loud ringing in the ears, or some more dramatic manifestation, preceding a flow of revelation, and the actual appearances of the one called Gabriel.

Muslims today teach that the book thus formed was a miracle in other ways than the method by which it came into the world. They claim that Muhammad was not only a non-reader, a non-literary sort of

man, but that he was not even schooled at all. Yet the Koran is a book of poetic prose. How could an unschooled man create such a thing, they ask.

The story continues. Muhammad received and gave his readings here and there, and to many individuals and groups. But would it all be remembered? Abu Bakr, senior companion and father-in-law of Muhammad, and the first Caliph following Muhammad's death, was afraid that those who received these revelations would all be killed in the battles going on at that time, and thus the Koran would be lost forever.

He therefore, they say, authorized a collection of the sayings to be made. Designated servants gathered bits and pieces of Muhammad's readings from papyrus, stones, leaves, the shoulder blades and ribs of animals, pieces of leather, wooden boards, and people's memories. This entire collection was then passed on to one Umar, another companion, and to Umar's daughter Hafsa. Umar later became the second caliph.

Then came Caliph Uthman, 644-656. Now, Uthman knew that other versions than Hafsa's were "out there, and in conflict with each other. In fact, early Muslims were killing one another over which version was best! Yes, even in its beginnings, violence marked the doings of this new religion.

Anyway, Uthman chose a man to prepare an official Koranic text. He revised it and compared it to Hafsa's. Satisfied that he now had the true Koran, he made copies of it, sending one to Mecca, and leaving one in Medina. All other "collections" were destroyed. All of this was completed by Uthman's death in 656.

What I have just shared is what Muslims all over the world are taught. It is official Islam. This, they say, is how the Koran came to us. *Trouble is, there is absolutely no evidence that any of this happened.* It is taken by faith. It is tradition.

Now, I believe in miracles. I believe in unusual things, things that come from the enemy and things that come from God and even things that come from me. I do not discount Islam on the basis of the strange and unexplainable, though many educated scholars among us and in the world have seen through Islam's origins. No, I discount it on the basis of the God of Israel and Jesus who has manifested Himself in my own life and Who has written a Book of His own that discounted Islam before the Koran came into being.

That's the *faith* approach. My faith in my book vs their faith in their book. But there is the *academic* approach. We'll talk about that in our next lesson.

