

The Qur'ānic Concept of the Injil- An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Scholars of comparative religion often observe that various religions have certain similarities. However, when they study these similarities with more care, they realize that apparently similar concepts are different in subtle and unexpected ways. Islam and Christianity share many apparently similar concepts such as, prophetology, revelation, sacred books, 'ūlamā' and clergy, and mosques and churches. This paper aims at elaborating the Qur'ānic concept of the Injil and investigates whether the Injil mentioned in the Qur'ān refers to the Christian canonical gospels or to a different scripture. The article starts with a brief survey of literature, advances to describe different uses of the kitāb in the Qur'ān, formulates a typology of the Injil-related Qur'ānic verses, turns to highlight the characteristics of the Injil mentioned in the Qur'ān, discusses the question of the distortion of the previous scriptures, and ends with a critical appraisal. It concludes that the Injil in the Qur'ān mostly refers to the revelation entrusted to Prophet 'Īsā not to the Christian canonical gospels. However, when the Qur'ān charges Christians with distorting their scripture, it may refer to the canonical gospels as well. Moreover, the paper relates this question to the debate of scriptural distortion and difference between Islam and Christianity in terms of prophetology and revelation and suggests that for this reason the Injil should be treated differently from the Tawrah mentioned in the Qur'ān.

Keywords: Relation between the Injil and the Gospels, Islam and Christianity, History of Qur'ānic Concepts, Revelation, Scripture

Introduction:

One of the Qur'ānic themes is previous revelations such as the Tawrah (Torah), the Zabūr (Psalms), and the Injil (Gospel). The Injil was the sacred book of the Christians, including the Arab Christians of Prophet Muhammad's (peace be on him) day. The Qur'ān depicts it as a divine revelation inspired to Prophet 'Īsā (Jesus Christ) (peace be on him) and mentions its many characteristics. Some Qur'ānic verses imply, as interpreted by some Muslim scholars, that the Arab Christians possessed some, at least partially, intact manuscripts up to the advent of Prophet Muḥammad. However, it is also an established fact that the Christians had canonized four gospels long before the advent of Islam. Moreover, they do not attribute them to Jesus Christ directly. Instead, they consider them a revelation inspired to the apostles. On the other hand, the Qur'ān mentions the Injil as a single book directly entrusted to Prophet 'Īsā. It never attributes the authorship of the Injil to any of the apostles of Prophet 'Īsā. This view is at variance with that of the Christians. Therefore, it is significant to elaborate the Qur'ānic concept of the Injil and investigate whether the Qur'ānic term Injil refers to the same canonical gospels of Christians or to a different source.

The theme is relatively unexplored and few scholarly works have dealt with it. According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953), a renowned Indian Muslim translator of the Qur'ān, the Injil mentioned in the Qur'ān is not the New Testament. It is not the four canonical gospels

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either. Instead, it is the single Gospel revealed to Jesus and taught by him. Its fragments survived in the canonical gospels as well as in some others whose traces have survived.¹ William C. Smith (d. 2000) also maintains that the identification of the gospels with the Injil cannot but be regarded as an error by Christians and by historians of religion. For him, the parallel between the New Testament, especially the four gospels, and ḥadīth is closer as both are the records of revelation not the revelation itself. He further proposes that the Qur'ān and Prophet Muḥammad are to Islam as Jesus Christ and St. Paul are to Christianity.² It is evident that validity of these parallels rests on the Christian understanding of prophetology and revelation alone. Moreover, they do not help in answering the question, "To which scripture does the Qur'ānic term "Injil" refer?"

Geoffrey Parrinder (d. 2005), in his *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (1965), dedicated a brief chapter to the Gospel (*Injīl*). He begins this chapter with a discussion of the origin of the word Injīl and then turns to the issue of the corruption of the previous sacred books, especially the Injīl. He underlines that some Muslim scholars accuse Christians of corrupting both the text and meaning of the Injīl whereas others of corrupting the meaning alone. He admits that to define the relationship between the Injīl of 'Īsā as perceived in the Qur'ān and the record of his words in the four Gospels, is a difficult task. He, however, believes that the four gospels were more than the Injīl. They revealed not only the words of Jesus but also his activity.³ He further comments—referring to the Qur'ānic verses such as 5:47-48 and 7:157—that the Qur'ān does not suggest that the Injīl entrusted to Jesus was other than the gospels canonized by Christians.⁴ Likewise, James Ritchie—after criticizing the Muslims' doctrine of the *tahrīf* (alteration) of the Jewish and Christian scriptures—also concludes, "The Qur'an does make statements which quite definitely imply that the true Tawrat and the true Injil were in possession of the Jews and Christians of Muhammad's day. There is therefore a probability that these references are to the same books which we know as the Old and New Testaments."⁵ This paper will assess these views in light of the Qur'ānic concept of Injīl.

The Qur'ānic Concept of the Kitāb:

The Qur'ān has conceived the Injīl as a *kitāb* (19:30). To have a better understanding of the Qur'ānic concept of the Injīl, it is useful to understand the Qur'ānic concept of the *kitāb* first. The term *kitāb* and different derivatives of its verb *kataba* occur frequently in the Qur'ān. It is an irregular verbal noun from *kataba yaktub*, which literally means act of writing.⁶ It also refers to a written thing.⁷ Originally, *kitābah* means compiling the words in writing. However, sometimes it metaphorically signifies the orally compiled words as well. For this reason, the word of God was named *kitāb* though it had not been compiled in written form yet (2:2; 19:30).⁸

According to Arthur Jeffery, this word appears to be a N. Semitic development and found only as a borrowed term in S. Semitic. For him, Arabic borrowed this word from Aramaic probably in al-Ḥīrah, whence the art of writing spread among the Arabs.⁹ However, the Arab lexicographers consider it a purely Arabic word and never refer to its borrowing from any other language.

Kitāb is also used as a noun having the connotation of book, sheet (*ṣaḥīfah*), letter, book of deeds, and ink-pot.¹⁰ Sometimes it means obligation (*farḍ*), decree (*ḥukm*), and fate (*qadar*).¹¹ The verb *kataba* has been used in the Qur'ān to signify a variety of meanings.

Sometimes it expresses the meaning of a focused intention (*al-murād al-mu'akkad*) (3:154; 58:21). It signifies making something obligatory (*farḍ*) on someone (2:180, 183; 4:77; 5:45; 57:27) as well as it denotes predestination (9:51).¹²

Different Uses of the Kitāb in the Qur'ān:

The term *kitāb* and its plural *kutub* occur 261 times in the Qur'ān; mostly in singular and only six times in plural. It occurs 128 times in Makkī verses and 133 times in Madanī verses.¹³ The Qur'ān uses it to signify different meanings. In some places, the intended meanings are obvious and in others various interpretations possible. In this article, the Qur'ānic commentaries of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) have been mainly consulted to define the meaning of the term *kitāb* in various Qur'ānic contexts. The former represents the traditional and the latter the rationalist approach.

The Kitāb as a Scripture in the Qur'ān:

The most frequent usage of the *kitāb* in the Qur'ān is for the scripture. The Qur'ān frequently refers to itself as a *kitāb*. It is one of its names.¹⁴ It stands for the Qur'ān about seventy-three times. The usage of the *kitāb* for the Qur'ān in Makkī revelations is much more frequent than that of in Madanī revelations (fifty times in Makkī verses and twenty-three times in Madanī verses). It is, however, noteworthy that the term *kitāb* was not applied to the Qur'ān itself until the number of its *sūrah*s and verses increased to the length of a book. That is why; the Qur'ān was first time called *kitāb* in *Sūrat al-A'raf*, which was the thirty-eighth *sūrah* according to the order of revelation.¹⁵

When the term *kitāb* is associated with Prophet Muḥammad or with Muslims, it definitely signifies the Qur'ān. It refers to the whole of the Qur'ān as well as to a part of it.¹⁶ It is frequently stated in the Qur'ān that the *kitāb* has been revealed to Prophet Muḥammad (3:3, 7; 4:105, 113, 136; 5:48; 16:64; 28:86; 29:45, 47, 51; 35:31; 39:41; 42:17). The Prophet teaches the *kitāb* and the *ḥikmah* to his people (2:129, 151; 3:164; 62:2). Surprisingly, most of the *sūrah*s, beginning with the *muqatta'āt* letters contain the word *kitāb* in their introductory verses, referring to the Qur'ān¹⁷ in different ways such as the book of guidance having no doubt (2:2); the book sent down to the Prophet (3:1-3; 7:2; 13:1; 14:1); the book of wisdom (10:1; 31:2); a book, with verses, having established meaning (11:1); the perspicuous book (12:1; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 43:2; 44:2); a book, whose verses are elaborated in detail (41:3); the book (15:1); and the revelation (32:2; 40:2; 45:2; 46:2). Even, some *sūrah*s not having the *muqatta'āt* letters contain the word *kitāb*, in their introductory verses, referring to the Qur'ān (18:1; 39:2). On some occasions, the *kitāb* refers to the Qur'ān being associated with the Muslims (3:79; 4:127, 140; 35:29), the people of the book (2:89, 176; 5:15), or even other unbelievers (6:144; 7:52; 21:10; 40:70).

The Qur'ān refers to the Tawrāh as a *kitāb* about 45 times (13 times in Makkī verses and 32 times in Madanī verses). It is evident that the proportional mention of the book as the Tawrāh in Makkī and Madanī verses is reverse to that of it as the Qur'ān. It is often mentioned that Allah gave Prophet Mūsā (peace be on him) the *kitāb* (2:53, 87; 6:154; 11:110; 17:2; 25:35; 28:43; 32:23; 41:45). Jews study it (2:44). Some of them only believe in a part of it and reject the rest (2:85). Others throw away the book of Allah behind their backs, as if they do not know it (2:101). A section of them distorts the *kitāb* with their tongues (3:78). They make

their scripture into separate sheets some of which they show to the people but others they conceal (6:91). However, as to those who comply with the *kitāb* (Tawrāh) and offer prayer, their reward would not be suffered to perish (7:170). The *kitāb* of Mūsā that makes things clear (37:117) is a light, mercy, and guidance for humanity especially the Children of Israel (6:91; 17:2). Al-Aṣḥāhānī, a famous lexicographer of the Qur'ānic vocabulary, says that the Tawrāh is called *kitāb*, because it contains the commandments.¹⁸ In contrast to the Tawrāh, the Injīl alone has been referred to by the *kitāb* only on four occasions; once in a Makkī verse and thrice in Madanī ones (4:171; 5:77; 19:30).

A frequent usage of the *kitāb* in the Qur'ān constitutes references to both the Tawrāh and the Injīl. It refers to both of them about 48 times (seven times in Makkī verses and forty-one times in Madanī sūrahs). The *kitāb* mostly refers to both the Tawrāh and the Injīl when it is made a part of a phrase *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the book). Moreover, such phrases are mostly used in Madanī verses and their occurrences in Makkī verses are very rare. For instance, the term *ahl al-kitāb* has occurred thirty-one times in the Qur'ān, but it has only once been used in the Makkī verses.¹⁹ The phrase *alladhīn ūtū 'l-kitāb/naṣībān min al-kitāb* (those who were given the book/a part of the book) has occurred twenty-one times in the Qur'ān, but it has only twice been used in the Makkī verses as well as the expression *alladhīn ātaynāhum al-kitāb* (those home we gave the book) has been mentioned six times out of eight in Madanī verses.²⁰ However, the phrase *alladhīn ūtū 'l-'ilm* (those upon whom knowledge has been bestowed) has been slightly more frequent in Makkī verses than in Madanī verses (five times in Makkī verses and four times in Madanī verses).²¹ However, the last expression does not necessarily mean the people of the book.

Besides referring to some specific revealed scriptures, the *kitāb* and its plural *kutub* also refer to all or some revealed scriptures in a general sense (3:79, 81, 119; 4:54, 153; 5:48; 6:49, 157; 29:27; 35:25, 32, 40; 68:37). This use happens in Makkī verses seventeen times and in Madanī verses twelve times. Muslims believe in all revealed books (2:285). Those who disbelieve in the revealed books are far from the right path (4:136). Some people dispute about Allah without the authority of any revealed book (22:8). The Prophet is demanded to believe in every book revealed by Allah (42:15). The Prophet is also advised to ask the unbelievers to bring a revealed *kitāb* as a proof for their beliefs (46:4). Therefore, it is evident that in Qur'ānic context the *kitāb* also refers to revealed books in a general sense and as a scriptural evidence.

Some Other Usages of the Kitāb in the Qur'ān:

The Qur'ān addresses its audience in a way that implies their familiarity with the idea that God keeps an inventory of all things as well as a complete record of human deeds.²² It uses the term *kitāb* for referring to *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* (Preserved Tablet) (6:38) about twenty-four times (fifteen times in Makkī verses and nine times in Madanī verses). The *kitāb* mainly refers to *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* when it has association with the divine knowledge. Everything has been inscribed in a *kitāb mubīn* (clear book) (6:59). Allah has the knowledge of the previous generations recorded in a *kitāb* (20:52). In certain contexts, the *kitāb* also refers to the predestination (7:37; 8:68, 75; 9:36). Sometimes it is referred to as *umm al-kitāb*

(13:39; 43:4). The *kitāb* has also occurred to stand for the record of deeds. It refers to it twenty times but never in Madanī verses.

Apart from above mentioned, the term *kitāb* has also occasionally occurred in the Qur'ān to signify a number of other meanings such as a letter (27:28-29), an act of writing (2:78; 3:48), a man-made book (2:79; 21:48), Qur'ānic themes or verses (98:3), a verbal noun to emphasize (*maṣḍar li 'l-ta'kīd*) (3:145; 4:24, 103), 'iddah (legal period of retirement assigned to a widow or divorced woman before she may marry again) of a woman (2:235), an agreement between a master and his slave to enable the slave to earn his freedom against a certain sum²³ (*mukātabah*) (24:33), and a term of time (15:4).²⁴

Synonyms of the Kitāb Used in the Qur'ān:

A common synonym of the *kitāb* is *ṣaḥīfah* (sheet), used in the Qur'ān only in plural (*ṣuḥuf*). It occurs seven times in Makkī verses and only once in Madanī ones.²⁵ It refers to some of the same meanings for which the term *kitāb* has been used in the Qur'ān such as the previous revealed scriptures (20:133; 74:52; 87:18) especially of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā (peace be on them) (53:36-37; 87:29); *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* (80:30); records of the deeds of human beings (81:10); and the Qur'ān (98:2).

Another synonym of the *kitāb* is the *Zabūr*. Its plural *zabur* has more frequently been used in the Qur'ān.²⁶ The literal meaning of the *Zabūr* is a written thing, from *zabara 'l-kitāb* to mean writing a book.²⁷ In the Qur'ānic context, however, it refers to a specific book revealed to Prophet Dāwūd (peace be on him) (4:163; 17:55); the records of the deeds (54:52); and most frequently to the previous revealed scriptures (3:184; 16:44; 21:105; 23:53; 26:196; 35:25; 54:43).

Three-fold Typology of the Injil-related Qur'ānic Verses:

The Qur'ān mentions the word *Injil* twelve times; all in Madanī revelations with only exception of 7:157, which is considered a Makkī verse. Moreover, it is noted that the mention of this word in the fifth *sūrat* al-Mā'idah—that is five times—is considerably more frequent than its mention in any other *sūrah*.²⁸ In the following lines, an attempt has been made to classify the *Injil*-related verses. These verses can be characterized to be of three-fold typology.

First, some verses indicate that Allah revealed/taught/gave or will teach the *Injil* to Prophet 'Īsā (3:48; 5:46, 110; 57:27). Verses mentioning the *Injil* as a revealed book without referring to Prophet 'Īsā should also be counted in this class (3:3-4, 65). Such verses apparently speak about the original *Injil* of Prophet 'Īsā, and do not refer to the Christian canonical gospels. Because according to both the Christians and Muslims, the Canonical Gospels were not revealed to Prophet 'Īsā. Rather they represent the contributions of Jesus's disciples and the disciples of his disciples. It should also be noted that this is the dominant category of the *Injil*-related verses.

Second, there are verses in which Allah enjoins the Christians to judge by what He revealed in the *Injil* (5:47) or rebukes them for not having stood fast by it (5:66, 68). Muslim scholars are of different views about whether the Christians mentioned in such verses are of the period of Prophet Muḥammad or are those who passed away prior to him. The intended meaning differs in either interpretation.

Third, there are verses in which the Injīl has been mentioned as containing a prophecy (7:157), promise (9:111), and similitude (48:29), which the Qur'ān refers to. In these verses, the Injīl besides referring to the original Injīl may refer to the existing canonical gospels as well, especially in the verse (7:157), which indicates that the people of the book find Prophet Muḥammad mentioned in the Injīl.

Characteristics of the Injīl Mentioned in the Qur'ān:

It is pertinent to note that the Qur'ān has always mentioned the word Injīl in singular form and never used its plural, although it seems that the plural form of the Injīl was not unfamiliar to the Arabs of the Prophet's time.²⁹ The Qur'ān, however, does not always refer to the Injīl by using its proper name, for sometimes it is also referred to by the word *kitāb*, as it has been discussed above. The Qur'ān mentions the Injīl with the same reverence as all other divine books. Many characteristics and attributes of the Injīl have been stated. Since discussing them seems helpful in clarifying the Qur'ānic concept of the Injīl, they will be briefly discussed in the following lines.

The first thing that strikes the mind of every person who reads the Injīl-related verses of the Qur'ān is that it mostly accompanies the Tawrāh and always comes after it. Eight times out of twelve, it immediately follows the Tawrāh. This reveals the close relation between them and that both belong to the same divine source. This also indicates that the Injīl descended after the Tawrāh and complemented it, as Prophet 'Īsā states elsewhere in the Qur'ān that he has come to confirm the Tawrāh and make lawful to the Israelites part of what was before forbidden to them (3:50). This view may also have some support from "Jesus's statement that he came not to destroy the Torah but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:15)."³⁰

The Injīl is a revelation given and taught by Allah to Prophet 'Īsā. It was a fact of such an importance that Allah declared it to his mother Maryam even before his birth (3:47-48). Moreover, this was one of the facts, which he told the Israelites in his cradle (19:30).

The Injīl is guidance for human beings. It is significant that the Injīl has twice been attributed as being the guidance in the verse (5:46). In the same verse, the Qur'ān characterizes it with three other remarkable attributes; a light, a confirmation of the Tawrāh, and an admonition (5:46). It may be convenient to quote the comments of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the above-mentioned attributes of the Injīl.

"The Injīl is guidance, for it contains the proofs of the oneness and exaltation (*tanzīh*) of Allah; of His exoneration (*barā'ah*) from having wife, son, similar, and opponent (*ḍidd*); and of the prophethood and the hereafter. This is the meaning of its being guidance. It is a light, for it explains the commandments of the *sharī'ah* and the details of the injunctions (*takālif*). However, its confirmation of what had come before it may denote that it contains the prophecies about the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be on him) and his advent. It has been described as guidance again, for its prophecies about the advent of Muḥammad (peace be on him) cause the people to be led to (the belief in) the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be on him). Since this is the real cause of disagreement between the Muslims, the Jews, and the Christians, Allah the Exalted repeats it again to remind that the Injīl clearly

indicates to the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be on him). Subsequently, it is the guidance in this matter, which extremely needs elaboration and ascertainment. It is, however, an admonition, because it contains forceful and emphasized advices, admonitions, and rebukes (*al-zawāʿjir*).³¹

The Qur'ān introduces Christians as a religious community by using an Injīl-related phrase *ahl al-Injīl* (5:47) while it never entitles the Jews as *ahl al-Tawrāh* or Muslims as *ahl al-Qur'ān*. It demands from them to judge by what Allah revealed therein, and entitles them rebels (*al-fāsiqūn*) if they fail to do so (5:47). The Injīl provides the guarantee of securing plenty of divine blessings to those who stand fast by it (5:66), but on the other hand, those who do not stand fast by it do not have any religious ground to stand upon, the Qur'ān declares (5:68). According to the Qur'ān, another important feature of the Injīl is that it contains the testimonies and the prophecies about the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad (7:157), the similitude of his companions (48:29), and a specific promise made by Allah for the believers (9:111).

“It is noted that most of the characteristics of the Injīl are shared by the Qur'ān as well. For instance, like the Injīl the Qur'ān is also a revealed book (3:7); it has been characterized as light (5:16), guidance (16:89), and admonition (10:57); it confirms the revealed books that had come before it (5:48). As the Injīl foretells about Prophet Muḥammad and contains the similitude of his companions and promises made by Allah for the believers, the Qur'ān, too, mentions Prophet 'Īsā as a highly respected prophet (19:30-34). It refers to his disciples, quotes their conversations (3:52; 5:111-113), and mentions the promises made by Allah for true Christians (2:62). The Tawrāh also shares many attributes with the Injīl (5:44).”

Question of the Scriptural Corruption of the Injīl:

The Qur'ān accepts the Tawrāh and the Injīl as genuine divine scriptures sent down from the same divine source as of the Qur'ān itself to the true prophets of both the Jewish and Christian communities respectively (5:44, 46; 17:2). The question of the corruption of the existing biblical texts, however, is a major cause of disagreement among the three communities (i.e., Jews, Christians, and Muslims) and there has always been heated discussion about this topic.³²

When scholars discuss the issue of the *taḥrīf* (distortion) of the previous scriptures, they often allude to certain Qur'ānic verses, which may be characterized as the “tampering” verses, because the tampering is a term that compasses a number of actions.³³ The term *taḥrīf* may be defined as “corruption of a document, whereby the original sense is altered. It may happen in various ways, by direct alteration of the written text, by arbitrary alterations in reading aloud the text which itself is correct, by omitting parts of it or by interpolations or by a wrong exposition of the true sense.”³⁴ Four Qur'ānic verses (2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41) use derivatives of the term *taḥrīf*.

The Qur'ān criticizes the believers for hoping that those Jews, a party among whom used to change the word of Allah after listening to it, will believe in them, by saying, “Can ye (O ye

men of Faith) entertain the hope that they will believe in you—seeing that a party of them heard the Word of Allah, and perverted it knowingly after they understood it?” (2:75). Of the Jews, there were those who displaced words from their places. The Qur'ān says in this regard, “Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) places, and say: ‘We hear and we disobey’; and ‘Hear what is not Heard’; and ‘Ra‘ina’; with a twist of their tongues and a slander to Faith. If only they had said: ‘We hear and we obey’; and ‘Do hear’; and ‘Do look at us’; it would have been better for them, and more proper. . . . They change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them—barring a few—ever bent on (new) deceits. . . . O Messenger! let not those grieve thee, who race each other into unbelief: (whether it be) among those who say ‘We believe’ with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews—men who will listen to any lie—will listen even to others who have never so much as come to thee. They change the words from their (right) times and places” (4:46; 5:13; 5:41).

All four of above-mentioned verses state that the Jews commit the tampering with the words (*taḥrīf al-kalim*). In the view of al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, the term *taḥrīf* literally means to incline (*imālah*). *Taḥrīf al-kalām* is to speak in such a way which causes the speech to carry more than one possible meaning.³⁵ Elsewhere, after having mentioned the possibility of either the distortion of text or meaning, he prefers the second one, arguing that it is difficult to alter the text after having been current and popular.³⁶ The author of *Lisān al-'Arab* also seems to hold that the Qur'ānic concept of *taḥrīf* alludes to the alteration of only meaning of the Jewish scripture rather than its text.³⁷

One of the terms used in the Qur'ān is *tabdīl* (2:59; 7:162). *Al-Tabdīl* generally signifies replacement of one thing with the other. However, sometimes it denotes merely alteration, whether there is substitution or not.³⁸ The Qur'ān refers to the people of the book who write something with their hands and then attribute it to God (2:79). The Qur'ān did not specify what they wrote.³⁹ However, the verse (2:79) indicates that certain people of the book living in Madīnah used to produce forgeries. As the Qur'ān attributes the production of fake book to their hands here, it also attributes the fake speech to their mouths in 9:30.⁴⁰

The Qur'ān also alludes to a form of distortion during recitation whose purpose is to give a false impression to the listener that what is being recited is the word of God⁴¹ (3:78). Al-Aṣḥānī comments that the first mention of the *kitāb* in the verse (3:78), signifies the book, which they wrote with their hands and was referred to in the verse 2:79, the second mention of the *kitāb* indicates to the *Tawrah*, and the third one refers to all books of Allah as a whole.⁴²

The verb *katam* (to conceal) along with the similar verbs *asarra* and *akhfā* constitutes a group of verses (i.e., 2:77, 140, 146, 159, 176; 3:71, 187; 4:37; 5:15; 6:91). In the concealment verses, the Qur'ān forbids the people of the book and especially the Jews from concealing the truth (3:187). It also informs that some of them deliberately conceal the truth (2:146), make the *Tawrah* into separate sheets some of which they show to the people but others they conceal (6:91). The Qur'ān forbids the people of the book, especially the Jews from and blames them for deliberately confusing the truth with the falsehood (2:42; 3:71). Here, the Qur'ān uses the derivatives of *al-labs*, which originally means to conceal something. It

also refers to the concealment of abstract concepts.⁴³ It is natural that the concealment of the truth leads to its confusion with the falsehood.

A circle even beyond the semantic field of tampering circumscribes verses that contain expressions of action: “selling for a small price,” “throwing behind backs,” and “writing with hand.”⁴⁴ Allah forbids the Jews from selling His signs for a small price (5:44). The Qur'ān informs that the people of the book, especially the Jews sell the signs of Allah for a miserable gain (3:187), even they write the book with their hands and then attribute it to Allah to sell it for a small price (2:79). He warns those who sell His signs, book, or covenant for a miserable gain, off a variety of torments (2:174; 3:77). However, in contrast to those who sell the signs of Allah for a small price, the Qur'ān praises those people of the book who believe in Allah, in the revelation to Muslims, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to Allah and do not sell the signs of Allah for a miserable gain. For them, there is a reward with their Lord, the Qur'ān declares (3:199). In two verses, Allah censures the people of the book for throwing the book of Allah and His covenant behind their backs (2:101). This expression is used in Arabic language to indicate negligence, abandonment, and rejection of something insignificant.⁴⁵ The Qur'ān also blames both the Jews and the Christians for forgetting a part of that whereof they were admonished (5:13-14). In Arabic, *al-nisyān* means to forget as well as to abandon something. Therefore, the Qur'ānic verses (5:13-14) can be interpreted as either forgetting or abandoning a part of that whereof they were admonished.⁴⁶

A Critical Appraisal:

The Qur'ān describes the Injīl as a *kitāb*. The term *kitāb* has been used in the Qur'ān to refer to several meanings. Nevertheless, in spite of the diversity of its usages, a specific meaning can easily be determined in light of the context and occasions of revelation. To use one word for various meanings and concepts is a basic characteristic and beauty of Arabic language. Those who have a command over and taste of this language, are never confused nor do face difficulty in identifying the correct and exact meaning.⁴⁷ Therefore, one should rightly differ with Herbert Berg on his assessment that the Qur'ān created confusion through its use of the word *kitāb* for various entities and concepts.⁴⁸

An important meaning of the *kitāb* is the previous revealed scriptures especially the Tawrāh and the Injīl. However, the specific usage of the *kitāb* for the Injīl is considerably less than that of it for the Tawrāh or the Qur'ān. It seems that the act of writing received special emphasis in the Qur'ānic concept of scriptures. Because the terms which have frequently been used in the Qur'ān for them are *kitāb*, *ṣuḥuf*, and *Zabūr* or *zukur*, all of which entail the meaning of writing.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that all scriptures contained fixed form of a book composed on pages and bound in covers. They could be written in any form on anything according to the circumstances of the day. Even sometimes spoken words are metaphorically called a *kitāb*. The Qur'ān does not clearly state whether the Injīl was composed during the life of Prophet 'Īsā or not. Nevertheless, if one accepts, as al-Ṭabarī does view, that the *kitāb* in the Qur'ānic verses 3:48 and 5:110 means act of writing,⁵⁰ one can presume that Prophet 'Īsā would have composed himself the Injīl; a fact which has some support from certain Christian apocryphal writings.⁵¹

The Qur'ān characterizes the Injīl as guidance, light, confirmation of the Tawrah, an admonition, and a revelation to Prophet 'Īsā (5:46). However, it does not describe what kind of Injīl or anājīl existed during the life of Prophet Muḥammad in the early decades of the seventh century CE in Arabia nor does it tell about its language. The Qur'ān always mentions the Injīl in singular form. It never uses its plural form or any Arabic equivalent of the term New Testament. It mentions the disciples of Prophet 'Īsā but never attributes the authorship of the Injīl to them. It seems that the Qur'ān deems the nature of the revelations of the Qur'ān, the Tawrah, and the Injīl the same, regardless of the extent the latter two remained intact.

Many Qur'ānic verses indicate that the people of the book especially the Jews of Madīnah tampered with their scriptures. This tampering entails a variety of actions. Majority of such actions may be interpreted as referring to the distortion of meaning rather than the text. Even the taḥrīf-related verses seem to refer to the distortions committed by the Jews in verbal communication as well as in the commandments of the Tawrah. Perhaps the only Qur'ānic verse, which clearly refers to the textual falsification, is 2:79.

Moreover, it should be noted that the contexts or the occasions of the revelation of all the "tampering verses" clearly indicate that they refer to the corruption of the Jews not that of the Christians. Perhaps the only exception in this regard is Qur'ānic verses 5:13-14, which accuse the Christians along with the Jews of having forgotten the part of that whereof they were admonished. However, forgetting itself is not clear in referring to the textual distortion, for it can be interpreted either as forgetting or as abandoning a part of that whereof they were admonished.⁵²

It is argued that the Tawrah and the Injīl should separately be treated in regard to the issue of distortion. Many Qur'ānic verses suggest that the Jews of the Madīnah possessed the Tawrah in its original language during the life of the Prophet regardless of its being textually intact or not. Moreover, the Qur'ān and the Jews were principally agreed on that the Tawrah was revealed to Prophet Mūsā (6:91). Therefore, it is reasonable to hold that the Qur'ān, while addressing the Jews of Madīnah, refers to the Tawrah possessed by them.

Contrarily, no existing evidence supports that the Qur'ānic Injīl existed in its original language in Arabia during the life of Prophet Muḥammad. Instead, historical evidences prove that the Christian canonical scriptures or their Arabic fragments were available to the Syrian-Arab Christians of that time.⁵³ In addition, the Islamic and the Trinitarian-Christian concepts of the revelation are different.⁵⁴ So it seems to be paradoxical to hold that the Qur'ān characterizes the Injīl as a book revealed to Prophet 'Īsā on one hand, and refers to the canonical gospels as the same Injīl, on the other hand.⁵⁵ This conclusion refutes the convictions of scholars like Parrinder and Ritchie who view that Qur'ānic references to the Injīl are to the canonical gospels or the whole New Testament. Perhaps it would be more accurate to hold, as Abu Laylah suggests,⁵⁶ that when the Qur'ān associates the Injīl with Prophet 'Īsā, it refers to the Injīl in which Muslims believe and whenever the Qur'ān charges the Christians with corrupting the Injīl, it refers to the four canonical gospels.

Briefly, one may rightly argue that neither the distortion of the Injīl should be related to that of the Tawrah nor the proofs of the textual distortion of both scriptures should be

considered to be solely based on the Qur'ānic evidences. Because the Muslim scholars have applied a number of research methods along with the Qur'ānic evidences, to reach the conclusions regarding the distortion of the previous scriptures⁵⁷ (i.e., the study of their discrepancies, the historical criticism, the critical study of the text and the chain of transmitters, and, last but not least, the study of irrational and blasphemous doctrines).

Endnotes:

¹ 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, 10th ed. (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2004), 291-92.

² Wilfred C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 17-18n13; Smith, "Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion," in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti*, ed. James Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder (London: Macmillan, 1959), 52.

³ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 142-51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵ James M. Ritchie, "Are the Old and New Testaments the Same as the Tawrat and Injil Referred to in the Qur'an?" *Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Studies* 4 (1981): 74.

⁶ Abū Fayḍ Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'urūs min jawāhir al-qāmūs*, ed. 'Alī Shayrī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1994), 2:351.

⁷ Muḥammad A'lā al-Thānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1413/1993), 2:1242.

⁸ Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt fi gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kaylānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 423.

⁹ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 248-49.

¹⁰ Muḥammad b. Mukram b. Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Qum: Nashr Adab al-Ḥawzah, 1405 AH), 1:698:99.

¹¹ Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fayrawz'ābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1412/1991), 1:279.

¹² Al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 424.

¹³ Muḥammad Fuwād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li al-fāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 592-95. It should be noted that in the present paper *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras* by Muḥammad Fuwād 'Abd al-Bāqī has been made a base to consider any verse Makkī or Madanī.

¹⁴ Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 2:14.

¹⁵ 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Miṣrī, *Mu'jam al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Surūr, 1367/1948), 117.

¹⁶ Al-Thānawī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, 2:1242.

¹⁷ However, al-Ṭabarī or the exegetes he has recorded, surprisingly identify, in four cases, the kitāb with the previous revealed scriptures especially the Tawrah and the Injīl (see the commentary of al-Ṭabarī on the verses 2:2; 10:1; 13:1; and 15:1).

¹⁸ Al-Aṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 425.

¹⁹ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 95-96.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

- ²² Daniel Madigan, "Book," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:243; also see Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- ²³ Al-Thānawī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, 2:1242-43.
- ²⁴ Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Dāmaghānī, *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Sayyid al-Ahl (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li 'l-Malāyīn, 1977), 401; Muḥammad Fuwād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Mu'jam gharīb al-Qur'ān mustakhrijan min ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Makkah: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah, n.d.), 205.
- ²⁵ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 403.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 329-30.
- ²⁷ 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutaybah, *Tafsīr gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqar (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1378/1958), 37.
- ²⁸ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 688.
- ²⁹ See Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-adab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1424/2004), 16:88; Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Ṣāliḥī al-Shāmī, *Subul al-hudā wa 'l-rashād fī sīrat Khayr al-'Ibād*, ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwiḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1428/2007), 1:534.
- ³⁰ Muhammad Abu Laylah, *The Qur'an and the Gospels: A Comparative Study* (Cairo: El-Falah for Translation Publishing, 1998), 143.
- ³¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, 12:9.
- ³² Abu Laylah, *Qur'an and the Gospels*, 173.
- ³³ Gordon Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of *Taḥrīf*: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's Commentary on Key Qur'anic Verses," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 207. Nickel counts twenty-five Qur'anic verses associated with the accusation of distortion. However, it seems that it is not a fixed counting, for the number of such verses can be either slightly reduced or extended, depending on their interpretations.
- ³⁴ Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Johannes H. Kramers, eds., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 560.
- ³⁵ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 114.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 440-41. Cf. Abu Laylah, *Qur'an and the Gospels*, 203.
- ³⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 9:43.
- ³⁸ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 39.
- ³⁹ 'Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World* 92, no. 3-4 (2002): 420.
- ⁴⁰ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 425.
- ⁴¹ Saeed, "Charge of Distortion," 420.
- ⁴² Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 425.
- ⁴³ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 447.
- ⁴⁴ Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of *Taḥrīf*," 207.
- ⁴⁵ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 480.
- ⁴⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 15:323.
- ⁴⁷ See Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa 'l-tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār al-Tūnasiyyah li 'l-Nashr, 1984), 1:93-100.
- ⁴⁸ Herbert Berg, "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'anic Term *al-Kitāb*," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 4 (1995): 773.
- ⁴⁹ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 211, 275, 423.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āyy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1421/2001), 6:422; 11:215.

⁵¹ Abu Laylah, *Qur'an and the Gospels*, 103.

⁵² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 15:323.

⁵³ David Cook, "New Testament Citations in the Ḥadīth Literature and the Question of Early Gospel Translations into Arabic," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 185.

⁵⁴ Saeed, "Charge of Distortion," 431-36; Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into Its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985): 129; also see "When Did the Bible Become an Arabic Scripture?" *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 7-23; Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scripture of the People of the Book in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ritchie, "Are the Old and New Testaments the Same as the Tawrat and Injil Referred to in the Qur'an?" 56-75; Saeed, "Charge of Distortion," 431-36.

⁵⁶ Abu Laylah, *Qur'an and the Gospels*, 111.

⁵⁷ For details, see Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm's Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa Ahwā' wa al-Naḥl* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1999).