

One Gospel?

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Christians believe that, in the light of all the available evidence, the Gospel accounts, in what we know as the New Testament, are the most reliable historical records of what Jesus taught and did as witnessed by his first disciples. However, while some Muslims agree that what Jesus taught was the Gospel they deny that it was the same Gospel as we have today.

What Gospel did Jesus preach?

Ahmad Deedat, a prominent Muslim protagonist, asks, "The Gospel is a frequently used word, but what Gospel did Jesus preach?" (Is the Bible God's Word?, p.8). The Christian answer is that the Gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached (Matthew 24:14), telling people that the Kingdom was near (Matthew 9:35) and that the only way to enter this spiritual kingdom was through himself (John 14:4).

Some Muslims argue that the existence of the four gospels in the New Testament is, in itself, evidence of corruption and unreliability. While Christians admit that the gospel of Jesus is indeed one, that "one" is presented in four ways under the

guidance of God's Spirit such that the message remains one and the same.

The Qur'an itself has at least two narratives of Jesus' birth and several narratives of some stories of Abraham, Adam and Noah within its one collection. Yet Muslims still accept that it is reliable scripture. Accordingly, it should not be a problem to find four narratives of what Jesus said and did.

The authenticity of the Gospel message

Questioning the authenticity of the Gospel, some Muslim friends raise the point illustrated in Ahmad Deedat's statement: "In his life time Jesus never wrote a single word, nor did he instruct anyone to do so." (ibid., p.8.) However, we know that Jesus could and did write (John 8:6-8). It is true to say that Jesus did not write down the gospel himself but, if such a charge is sufficient to discredit the validity of the Christian scriptures, this can also be levelled against Muhammad and the Qur'an. Muhammad did not write nor did he instruct Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman to collect and compile one official Qur'an. In fact, Bukhari states that when Zaid Bin Thabit was asked by Umar and Abu Bakr to collect and compile the first Qur'an, he said, "How would you do something which Allah's apostle did not do?" It was Abu Bakr, not Muhammad, who replied, "By Allah, it is a good project." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 6, p. 477)

It is noteworthy that, before Jesus' crucifixion, he told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of all the things he had said and done (John 14:26 - 16:13) and, before his resurrection, he instructed them to spread the message to all nations (Matthew 28:19,20). Just as the Qur'an was collected into a fixed form after Muhammad's death, so the Gospel narratives were put together after Jesus' ascension. If Muhammad's *ashab*, companions, are said to have remembered what he told or narrated to them, in order that the Qur'an could be put together afterwards, then it is also possible that the disciples of Jesus remembered what Jesus said, thus explaining why the Gospel is available to us today in its four complementary forms.

Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come down and lead them. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Qur'an testifies that the disciples of Jesus were inspired. No such promise was given

to the disciples of Muhammad who put the Qur'an together. The Holy Spirit is the reason why the message of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John came to be and is still available to us today.

Strictly, these gospels are not called those "of" Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: in Greek the title is "the Gospel according to". It is only for brevity that the shorter title is employed. So Christians claim that there is indeed "One Gospel" just as there is one Christ, who claimed that his teaching was from God (John 7:16; 8:28; 12:49,50). Christians also assert that the Gospel relates not only to what Jesus said but also to what he did. The proclamation, which led to the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles, was the good news that he came specifically to give his life for many; he died on the cross to bring about forgiveness of sins; he rose again to demonstrate his victory over death, and he lives to grant eternal life to whoever believes in him.



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