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## THE BIBLICAL ELEMENT IN THE QURAN.

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Two-thirds of the Mahometan bible consist of tales of men connected with Jewish and Christian history. Concerning these portions of the Quran it is the purpose of the writer in this paper to present the facts, and to suggest an answer to the following questions: Who are the Bible characters mentioned, and what does the Quran say about them or their sacred books? What is the nature of the material which contains these biblical references and what was the source from which Mahomet drew his information? A brief résumé of the characters and events of biblical fame which are recorded in the Quran is as follows; the creation of Adam and Eve, their temptation by Iblis, who had been cast out of heaven for refusing to worship man, their fall and ejection from Paradise; Cain and Abel and the first human tragedy; Noah and the flood; Abraham, a man of great veracity, who reproved his people for their worship of idols, had visits from heavenly messengers, was promised Isaac and Jacob, pleaded for Lot, and was kept by heaven from offering up his son Isaac; Lot, who was delivered from destruction, while his wife, who tarried behind, was overwhelmed in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; Ishmael; Isaac; Jacob; Joseph, who had told dreams which aroused the envy of his brethren, was cast into a pit, taken and sold as a slave by the Midianites into Egypt, grew in favor with a ruler of the land, was tempted by his master's wife, and would have sinned with her had not the Lord at that moment appeared to him, was cast into prison, interpreted the king's dream and was released from confinement, gradually raised to high position and power, visited in a time of famine by his brethren who came to buy corn, his device to bring Benjamin his brother to Egypt,

and the final settlement of the house of Jacob in the land which Joseph ruled; Moses, his early life in Egypt, flight into Midian, the burning bush, before Pharaoh, miracles and plagues, the Exodus and the crossing of the Red sea, the journey in the wilderness, manna, quails, giving of the Law on Sinai, worship of the golden calf and the sending of the spies into the Promised Land; Saul chosen king; David and Goliath and a few other meagre and indefinite references to the life of David, his sin and repentance, his Psalms; Solomon, famous for wisdom and power, power even over the winds and over the ginns who were compelled to labor without wages on his public buildings, his visit from the Queen of Sheba; Elijah and Elisha; Jonah and his experiences; Job; and Ezra whom the Jews called the son of God. These stories, as presented in the Quran, are characterized by a strange mixture of truth and fiction, of graphic imagery and of childish inanity. We find remarkable correspondences in style and language with the stories of the Jewish Scriptures and weird and fanciful deviations from them.

The references to the New Testament or Christian Scriptures are comparatively few:—Zacharias, his prayer, and its answer; John, the Baptist; Mary, the mother of Jesus who is represented as the sister of Aaron; Jesus, son of Mary. Jesus Christ is spoken of in the Quran as “Jesus, son of Mary,” “Messiah” [3: 40] “The Word of God” [4: 169] “Word of Truth” [19: 35] “Messenger of God” [4: 169] “Servant of God” [19: 31] “Prophet of God” [19: 31] “Illustrious in this world and in the next” [3: 40]. The teaching of Mahomet concerning Christ was that he was miraculously born of the Virgin Mary under the trunk of a palm tree. The Jews charged Mary with being a harlot and unchaste, though her parents were good people, but the babe speaking from his cradle vindicated his mother’s honor. Jesus performed many miracles even from his youth, giving life to the clay figure of a bird, healing the blind, curing the leper, quickening the dead and bringing down from heaven a table as a festival and a sign. Some think that this latter is a reference to the Lord’s Supper. Jesus was specially commissioned as the apostle and prophet of God to confirm the

Law and to reveal the Gospel, and he declared his mission with many manifest signs, being strengthened by the Holy Ghost, and foretold the advent of another prophet whose name would be Ahmed. The Jews intended to crucify Jesus, but God deceived them by transforming another into his Master's likeness, and him they took and crucified, while Jesus, like Enoch and Elijah, was translated to Heaven. It is quite remarkable that there is no reference to, and apparently no acquaintance with, the period of Christian history subsequent to the ascension of Christ, or the work and writings of the Apostles.

In seeking to discover from what sources Mahomet drew this material, we pass over into a much more difficult and unsatisfactory field of inquiry, inasmuch as the early history of Arabia before the time of Mahomet is as yet shrouded in mystery. Much is to be hoped for in such work as is now being done by Dr. Edward Glaser. From inscriptions which have been already published it would appear that Judaism and Christianity had both made their appearance in Arabia as early as the fourth century, A. D. The Jews soon became very numerous and gained some political power. Their religion was not the pure Old Testament type, but had greatly degenerated and become deeply dyed with many rabbinical notions. Most of these Jews dwelt around Yemen, Yathrib and Mecca, and were very superstitious, though in general culture and refinement they were far above their Arab companions. The Christians probably never became so numerous or gained so strong a foothold in Arabia as the Jews, and the Christianity of these times, if such it may be called, was of a very corrupt character and little else than another form of idolatry. There were at this time in Arabia, however, a few enlightened souls who had revolted against the impurity of the existing faiths and called themselves "Hanifs" or seekers after truth. They had been aroused to deep reflection by the existence of many national traditions which seemed to point back to the time of a purer and earlier faith. These legends were a part of the folk-lore of the land, the exact nature and extent of which it is impossible at present to determine.

When Mahomet first appeared it was as a reformer and his endeavor was to urge a return to the religion of Abraham. His attitude toward both Jews and Christians was one of warm friendship and he sought by every means to win them to his side. He declared that he was that great prophet whom the Lord God had promised to raise up unto them, the last and greatest of Heaven's Divine messengers. His evident design in referring so frequently to their sacred writings was to prove his divine mission and to show the people of his day that if they rejected his message they would surely suffer similar destruction with the sinners upon whom God's wrath had in olden times fallen. The Quran was at first declared to be concurrent with the Old and New Testament, and to be only an Arabic version given by God in order that the Arabs might not say that the Scriptures had not been revealed to them. The Jewish and Christian Scriptures are always mentioned with great reverence and respect, their existence is invariably presupposed, their inspiration strongly attested, their divinity and genuineness never doubted. Even when Mahomet turned in his rage against the Jews, he never accused them of having altered their Scriptures, although he claims in several places that they had suppressed a part of them which referred to himself and his mission. The Jews and Christians are spoken of over fifty times as "The people possessing the Book, Scripture or Gospel," "The people of the Admonition or Revelation." The reason for the large amount of Jewish material in the Quran becomes very manifest when we consider that it was during the sixth to the tenth years of his ministry [615-619] that these references are most frequent: indeed the "suras" of this period consist almost entirely of Scripture stories and are different not only in their subject matter, but also in their rhetorical form. No longer do they consist of those short ecstatic utterances which are so characteristic of the earlier "suras," but they betray much careful study. A large amount of time must have been required to digest and assimilate so much biblical material and to work it up into such elaborate and rhythmical sentences. This was the time when Mahomet's hopes for help from Jewish quarters were most sanguine. But, disappointed by their rejection

of him, for few Jews ever became his faithful followers, he turned upon them with threats and rebukes, and in a few years even drove them from the land by slaughter and exile. The disappearance of the Jews was followed by a corresponding change in the material of the Quran. This fact, among many others, gives unmistakable evidence that the Quran was not systematically written, but grew up out of the circumstances and feelings of the day, consequently after Mahomet lost all hope of gaining the Jews to Islam, that constant repetition of Bible story and rabbinical legend which was so common for several years gradually ceased.

His attitude toward the Christian Scriptures was much the same as toward the Jewish Scriptures. The references to the New Testament are found mostly in the "suras" which were composed during the last three years at Mecca just before the Hejira. At this time Islam made its nearest approach to Christianity and the Quran embodied the most of the Christian history which it contained. But neither Judaism nor Christianity from their very nature could ever go hand in hand with Islam. Mahomet was doomed to disappointment at the hands of both. The references to them from this period on are very infrequent. Their sacred books are still spoken of with great reverence, but few of their stories are any longer appropriated. Christians, when mentioned thereafter, are treated with indifference, but Jews are generally referred to in great bitterness of spirit, and this is as we should expect, for Mahomet had set large hopes upon them and his disappointment was proportionately hard to bear.

As to the source of Mahomet's biblical material, although there have been many various opinions expressed, we may say that there are just three views. *First*, there is that view which would make the *Jewish and Christian Scriptures themselves* the source from which Mahomet derived these stories. The strongest advocate of this position is Sprenger, who expresses his belief that Mahomet could both read and write and that he possessed a version of portions of the Scriptures, both genuine and apocryphal. Others who hold this view say that Mahomet did not himself read, but that Jewish and Christian friends recited to him portions of their sacred books. A

*second* view is that he gathered his material *from no written source* but from the floating legends of his time and the oral traditions of his country, that folk-lore for which Arabia has ever been famous. Gerock is the best representative of this school. Mahomet gained this knowledge from no written source, but from Jewish tradition current among the people of Arabia and the corrupted version of Christian history which was prevalent in the southern part of the peninsula or was introduced through commercial travelers from Syria. The *third* view is that the *Talmud* is the basis of the *Quran*, and that the few references to Christianity which it contains found their way into it through Jewish sources or from apocryphal books. Emanuel Deutsch is the great exponent of this view. "When the *Talmud* was gathered in, the *Quran* began. Though Mahomet may not have seen the *Talmud*, nor ever have heard its name, he seems from his childhood to have breathed its very atmosphere. It is not merely parallelisms, reminiscences, allusions, technical terms and the like of Judaism, its law and dogma and ceremony, its Halacha and Haggadah which we find in the *Quran*, but we think," says Deutsch, "that Islam is neither more nor less than Judaism as adapted to Arabia—plus the apostleship of Jesus and Mahomet." \*

The first view will not account for the variations in the stories, the second does not explain the remarkable similarity in style and language, the third view explains both.

\*Literary Remains of Emanuel Deutsch, p. 64.