

History Testifies to the Infallibility of the Qur'an: Early History of the Children of Israel

Louay Fatoohi and Shetha al-Dargazelli

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Dr. Fatoohi and Prof. al-Dargazelli have produced an intriguing and far-reaching comparison of the Bible and the Qur'an relating to Moses and the Israelites. Both authors are *khalifahs* of Shaykh Muhammad al-Casnazani al-Husseini of the Aliyyah Qadiriyyah Casnazaniyyah Sufi tariqah. They hold degrees in physics from Baghdad University and Durham University, and have authored numerous books, especially on Sufism, in Arabic and English.

Although readers might expect this book to address literary and cultural issues surrounding the shared but different accounts of Moses and the Israelites in the Bible and the Qur'an, the authors have chosen to focus on demonstrating the Qur'an's historical accuracy. Dividing their book into 10 chapters, they argue alternately that the Bible is inconsistent and historically inaccurate, while the Qur'an is consistent and confirmed by external historical evidence. The Biblical account of Moses and the Israelites is not directly compared to the Qur'anic account; rather, the Bible is used primarily as a foil to emphasize what the authors see as the Qur'an's reliability. For example, while the authors point out that the Bible appears to give various names for Moses' father-in-law (Exodus 2:18, 3:1,

4:18, 18:1; Numbers 10:29; Judges 1:16, 4:11), they do not mention the work of Biblical scholarship on this issue or the inconsistent identification of Moses' father-in-law with the prophet Shu'ayb by Muslim exegetes. Making such direct comparisons is frustrated also by the book's lack of an index.

The authors' approach effectively highlights the discrepancies between the Biblical and Qur'anic accounts of Moses and the Israelites. The explanation of these discrepancies is unfortunate, however, in its rather limited range of theoretical, textual, and historical considerations. Throughout the book, the authors do not explain the differences between the Bible and Qur'an, but simply adduce cases of difference as evidence that the Qur'an is reliable and the Bible is not. In chapter 7, for example, the authors assert that the Bible is wrong based on their observation that the Qur'an does not appear to distinguish two different Pharaohs during Moses' lifetime, as does the Bible (Exodus 2:23). This conclusion then allows the authors to identify the Pharaoh of the Qur'an with the historical Pharaoh Ramses II, and to give the precise date of 1212 BCE for the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The authors make no reference to the huge amount of Biblical and Egyptological scholarship that addresses these same issues.

At times, the authors merely assert that since the Biblical narrative is inconsistent (both internally and in relation to historical evidence), the Bible must be wrong when it appears to contradict the Qur'an. This sort of reasoning is often supported by selective references to Biblical scholarship and creative historical reconstructions for Qur'anic references. The authors conclude that their findings prove that the Qur'an was authored by "Allah, the Perfect Historian."

It is a credit to the authors that they reject earlier attempts to explain discrepancies between the Bible and Qur'an as due to a garbled transmission of Biblical stories into Arabic. They make this point in their critique of earlier explanations of the occurrence of Haman with the Pharaoh in the Moses story in the Qur'an. The authors insist that since the Qur'an mentions Haman, he must have been an actual historical figure related to the Pharaoh. Rather than responding with more sophisticated and convincing explanations to earlier scholars' claims that the Qur'an contains a confused version of the Bible, the authors resort to scholarly tit for tat by disparaging the integrity of the Biblical account. It is hard to see, given recent various interdisciplinary approaches (e.g., Newby, Schöck, Firestone, Lassner, Stetkevych, Wasserstrom) to studying the Qur'an and Bible, why it is still necessary to impugn the Bible in order to defend the Qur'an.

In all, this book provides a contribution to the much-needed study of the relationship of the Qur'an and the Bible. Scholars of both revealed texts should applaud this attempt to include the Bible and other extra-Qur'anic sources in a study of the Qur'an. Increased interaction and dialogue among scholars of the Bible and Qur'an promises to produce fresh insights and a better understanding of religious texts.

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