The Reliability of the Gospels

Big picture: How many of you face opposition when sharing the gospel with Muslims? What kinds of questions or challenges do you encounter, especially when referring to the four Gospels of the New Testament?

1. Defending the Reliability of the Gospels

INTRODUCTION



How many of you face opposition when sharing the gospel with Muslims? What kinds of questions or challenges do you encounter, especially when referring to the four Gospels of the New Testament?

OPPOSITION

From the very beginning of the Church—right back to the apostolic age—the gospel has always been challenged, questioned, and even twisted.

- The apostle Paul warns us in Galatians that some were preaching another gospel.
- Peter urges us to defend the truth against distortion.
- And Jude calls us to contend for the faith—to stand firm, and to refute those who preach a false gospel.

THE GOSPEL

Where do we begin when explaining it?

Because the gospel isn't just something found in four books—it's a message woven throughout the whole Bible. It's connected to powerful themes like:

- Salvation by Jesus' death and resurrection
- Forgiveness of sins
- Eternal life
- Reconciliation
- Redemption
- Atonement
- Freedom from guilt
- Blood sacrifice
- God's Kingdom
- Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone

ANOTHER COMPLICATION

The word gospel doesn’t mean the same thing in Islam.

- For Christians, the Gospel is first and foremost a theological message—the good news of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection, by which our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to God. However, the term also refers to the written accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry: the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As scholar Gordon Nickel puts it, it is one Gospel in four accounts.
- For Muslims, however, the term “Gospel” (known in the Qur'an as the Injil) is understood differently. It refers not to a theological message or four written accounts, but to a single book—a divine revelation that was supposedly given directly to Jesus by Allah.

The real issue: Which source tells the true story of Jesus?

2. Jesus: tracing the authentic source

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

The Four Canonical Gospels

- The aim of this presentation is to demonstrate that the four Gospels of the New Testament are true and trustworthy. They are both historically credible and theologically coherent, rooted in real events and deeply connected to the message of the Old Testament.

The Quranic (Gospel) Injil

- In contrast, I will show that the Qur’anic claim of a divine book called the Injil—translated in English as “the Gospel”—is neither historically credible nor theologically coherent when compared with the earlier revelations it claims to affirm.

OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

- Timeline
- Historical Credibility
- Theological Coherence
- Discussion and Application

CRITERIA FOR HISTORICAL CREDIBILITY

Higher Criticism

- Dating
- Authorship
- Jewishness
- Archaeological Evidence

3. Timeline: from the New Testament to the Qur’an

THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

- 33 AD - The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus

CANONICAL GOSPELS

- 50 - 90 AD Mark, Matthew, Luke and John – Eyewitnesses Testimonies

APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS

- From 100 AD Onward:

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas:

The young Jesus:

> "*...take soft clay and form it into twelve sparrows... and Jesus clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows: 'Go!' And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping.*" *The infancy Gospel of Thomas (Apocryphal)*

> ***This story is also found in the Quran***

> *Surah Al-Imran (Quran 3.49):*

> > *"...I make for you from clay the figure of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Allah's permission..."*

> > ***The Gospel of Peter (Apocryphal)***

> > *Dramatic and highly symbolic resurrection scene.*

> > > *"They saw three men coming out of the tomb, two of them supporting one, and a cross following them. And the heads of the two reached to heaven, but the head of the one whom they were leading reached beyond the heavens. And they heard a voice from the heavens saying, 'Have you preached to those who sleep?' And the cross answered, 'Yes.'" Gospel of Peter, verses 35–42*

> > ***THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY***

> > *A collection of Gnostic documents from the 4th century AD.*

> > ***The Second Treatise of Great Seth***

> > > *I was not afflicted at all, yet I did not die in solid reality but in what appears, in order that I not be put to shame by them"*

> > ***The Gospel of Peter***

> > > *"And he kept silent, as though he had no pain." Gospel of Peter, verse 10*

> > ***THE QUR'AN'S SIMILAR STATEMENT ON JESUS' CRUCIFIXION***

> > *An-Nisa Quran 4.157, the Qur'an says:*

> > > *"They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear to them so."*

4. Historical criteria for evaluating the Gospels

- *Early Dating: How do we know the Gospels were written close to the time of Jesus? Authorship: Can we trust the people who wrote them?*
- *Jewishness: Do the Gospels reflect the cultural, religious, and historical world of first-century Judaism accurately?*
- *Archaeological Evidence: Do the Gospels describe real places, customs, and details that archaeology has confirmed?*

5. The Dating of the Gospel of Mark

WHEN WAS THE GOSPEL OF MARK WRITTEN?

General View: Most scholars agree that Mark was the first Gospel written but there is debate about when it was written:

- *Some scholars say after 70 AD*
- *Others (especially evangelical scholars) suggest it could be as early as the late 40s or early 50s*
- *Why Do Some Date It After 70 AD? This view is mainly based on Mark chapter 13, where Jesus speaks about "the abomination of desolation."*
- *Many assume this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. So they conclude Mark must have written it after that event.*

- *PROBLEMS WITH THE LATER DATE VIEW*

- *This assumes Jesus couldn't have predicted the future. But early Christians believed Jesus spoke prophetically, so this argument doesn't hold much weight.*
- *The details in Mark 13 don't match the historical account by Josephus (Jewish Historian) about the fall of Jerusalem. So it's not a perfect fit.*

WHAT DOES EARLY CHURCH TRADITION SAY?

Some early Christian sources suggest Mark wrote his Gospel before Peter's death (around 64–67 AD).1

CLUES FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

- *Acts ends before Paul's trial in Rome, which likely happened around 63 AD. This means Acts was probably written around that time*
- *Since Luke wrote Acts as a sequel to his Gospel, Luke's Gospel must have been written earlier*
- *Luke used Mark as a source, so Mark's Gospel must be even earlier. That points to a possible date in the late 40s or early 50s*

WHY THIS MATTERS

- *An early date supports the idea that the Gospel of Mark is based on eyewitness testimony*
- *It leaves less time for legends or myths to develop*

- *It shows that the Gospel accounts were written while many original witnesses were still alive.*

6. The Dating of the Gospel of Matthew

WHEN WAS THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW WRITTEN?

Common Scholarly View

Some scholars suggest Matthew was written later, in the 80s or 90s.

They argue: Matthew talks about the church, using the word "church" twice.

PROBLEMS WITH THE LATE DATE VIEW

- *Paul wrote about the church in his letters—well before the 80s.This shows that church teaching was already important in the early years.*
- *Matthew seems to write for a Jewish audience. If so, an earlier date makes more sense—before the final break between Jews and Christians. Early Christians were mostly Jewish and still hoped more Jews would follow Jesus.*

CLUES FROM THE GOSPEL ITSELF

- *Matthew includes the story of the temple tax in chapter 17.*
- *He's the only Gospel writer who does.*
- *That would seem odd if the temple had already been destroyed in 70 AD.*
- *The Sadducees appear seven times in Matthew, but only once each in Mark and Luke. The Sadducees were closely connected to the temple. It makes more sense that Matthew wrote while the temple was still standing.*

A MORE LIKELY TIMEFRAME

- *Taking all this into account, Matthew may have written his Gospel in the 50s or 60s AD.*

This would be a time when:

- *The temple still existed*
- *Most Christians were Jewish*
- *Eyewitnesses to Jesus were still alive*
- *The church was growing, but still closely linked to its Jewish roots*

7. The Dating of the Gospel of John

Early church tradition consistently affirms that John the Apostle, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote the Gospel while he was living in Ephesus, near the end of his life.

> *Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." IRENAEUS, AGAINST HERESIES 3.1.1*

8. A case for the authorship of the Gospels

CAN WE TRUST THE GOSPEL AUTHORS?

Some people claim, "The Gospels are anonymous—we don't even know who wrote them!"

WERE THE GOSPELS ANONYMOUS?

- *It's true the names Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John don't appear inside the main text.*
- *But in the ancient world, scrolls had the author's name written on a tag attached to the outside, or at the end of the document.*

The names of the writers were indeed known, Bruce Metzger says:

> *In the book trade of antiquity the title of a roll that contained a single work would have its title written on a strip or tag (silluboj) of papyrus or vellum projecting from the back of the roll. Inside the roll the title was placed also at the end of the work. Usually the title is expressed in the simplest possible form: the author's name in the genitive case, then the title, followed (if applicable) by the number of the book.2*

- *Early readers knew exactly who the message was from—especially when the Gospels were sent by messengers known to both sender and recipient.*

HOW DID PEOPLE KNOW WHO WROTE THE GOSPELS?

- *In the first century, documents were shared by couriers—not mailed anonymously.*
- *Imagine someone delivering a Gospel to a church—no one would accept it without asking, "Who is this from?"*
- *Knowledge of the author was passed along with the text.*

EARLY CHURCH TESTIMONY

- *Papias (c. 70–155 AD): Mark accurately recorded Peter's teachings. "Mark became the interpreter of Peter... he made no false statements."*
- *Irenaeus (c. 180 AD): "Mark... handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter."*
- *The early church was unanimous in recognizing: Craig Blomberg Says:*

> *The early church unanimously agreed '...all of the external evidence — the witness of the early church fathers — uniformly supports the belief that Matthew (the tax collector turned disciple), Mark (the companion of Peter and Paul), and Luke (Paul's "beloved physician") penned the Gospels attributed to them.' 3*

- *Matthew – A tax collector turned disciple*
- *Mark – Peter's companion*
- *Luke – Paul's physician and fellow traveller*
- *John – The beloved disciple*

WHY USE LESSER-KNOWN NAMES?

- *If the early church wanted to forge names for authority, why not use Peter or James?*
- *Instead, they honestly used names like Mark and Luke—less impressive, but truthful.*
- *This actually strengthens the case for authentic authorship.*

WAS LUKE A RELIABLE HISTORIAN?

- *Luke tells us he investigated everything carefully and used eyewitness sources.*
- *Scholars like Sir William Ramsay and Colin Hemer confirmed Luke's precision with geography, culture, and politics.*
- *One scholar William M. Ramsay put it this way:*

"For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd."[4]

WHAT ABOUT OTHER ANCIENT WORKS?

- *Historian Richard Bauckham notes that many ancient biographies were "formally anonymous."*
- *For example, Lucian's Life of Demonax doesn't name its author in the text, but everyone knew who wrote it.*
- *The same was true for the Gospels—early Christians knew the authors from the start.*

COMPARE WITH THE QUR'AN

- *The Qur'an also doesn't say who wrote it.*
- *Muslims learn from later tradition (about 250 years after Muhammad) that it was written down by Zaid bin Thabit, his secretary.*

CONCLUSION: THE NAMES WERE KNOWN

- *The claim that the Gospels were anonymous ignores historical context.*
- *From the earliest times, Christians knew who wrote them.*
- *The Gospel writers were close to the events and connected to eyewitnesses.*
- *They passed on truthful records, not just spiritual ideas.*

9. *Examining the Jewishness of the Gospels*

JESUS AS THE NEW MOSES

Matthew presents Jesus as a new and greater Moses—one who brings God's Word with divine authority.

- *Moses gave the Law on a mountain. Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount.*

FIVE MAJOR DISCOURSES

Matthew arranges Jesus' teachings into five major sections.

- *This mirrors the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.*
- *This structure would feel familiar and meaningful to Jewish readers.*

ECHOES FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES

Jesus' early life (like the flight to Egypt) and His transfiguration echo events in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Matthew uses this style to connect Jesus directly to Israel's history.

JESUS' AUTHORITY OVER THE LAW

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

- *"You have heard it said... but I say to you..."*
- *He doesn't just teach the Law—He speaks with authority over it.*
- *This was a bold claim to be greater than Moses.*

CONCLUSION

- *Matthew is not just telling stories—he's making a case:*
- *Jesus is the promised Messiah, the new Moses, and the one with divine authority.*
- *He is the fulfillment of Jewish hopes and Scriptures.*

10. *Archaeological Evidence Supports the Gospels*

EVIDENCE OF A PERSON

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus to death.

- *In 1961, archaeologists discovered a stone inscription in Caesarea Maritima with Pilate's name and title: "Prefect of Judea."*
- *This confirms that Pilate was a real historical figure, just as the Gospels describe.*

EVIDENCE OF A PLACE

In John 5, Jesus heals a man at the Pool of Bethesda near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem.

- *For years, skeptics claimed this place didn't exist.*
- *But in the 20th century, archaeologists uncovered a two-level pool with five porticoes—just as described in John's Gospel.*

WHY THIS MATTERS

- *These findings show the Gospel writers were accurate, not just spiritually but historically.*
- *The world of the Gospels is not imaginary—it's anchored in the real world.*

THE GOSPELS ARE:

- *Theologically rich*
- *Historically grounded*
- *Culturally connected to Judaism*

11. *Biblical Theology in the of the New Testament*

YAHWEH RETURNS

- *The Gospel of Mark begins by announcing "the beginning of the good news," but quickly introduces John the Baptist.*
- *John's role is to "prepare the way for the Lord"—a phrase drawn from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of a time when God's presence, which had left the temple, would return to rescue and reign over His people.*

This return wasn't just symbolic—God would come as:

- *A Shepherd to care for His people (Isaiah 40)*
- *A King to sit at God's right hand (Psalms 110:1),*
- *A Judge to rule the nations (Daniel 7's "Son of Man").*

Other themes:

- *When Jesus begins proclaiming, "The Kingdom of God is near," He is fulfilling this expectation of Yahweh's return.*
- *John's role as the forerunner, and Jesus' announcement that "the time is fulfilled," point to a theological climax—not just a new teaching, but the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise.*
- *The idea of God dwelling among His people runs throughout the Old Testament.*
- *Jesus' coming is not a new invention—it is the realization of Israel's deepest hope: that Yahweh would return and reign.*

GOD'S PRESENCE

One of the most beautiful and consistent themes in the Bible is God's presence with His people.

In Genesis 3:8, God walks in the garden with Adam and Eve—His presence was immediate, personal, and relational.

After the fall, humanity was driven out of that direct presence, and Scripture's story becomes about restoring what was lost.

In the Old Testament, God continues to dwell among His people through:

- *The pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21),*
- *The tabernacle (Exodus 25:8)*
- *The temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:10-11).*

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, GOD'S PRESENCE BECOMES PERSONAL AGAIN:

- *John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The word "dwelt" means "tabernacled."*
- *Jesus is God's presence in human form, living among us just like Yahweh did in the Old Testament.*

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD NOW DWELLS IN BELIEVERS:

- *1 Corinthians 3:16: "You yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in your midst."*
- *The ultimate goal of salvation is to be brought back fully into God's presence forever:*
- *Revelation 21:3: "Now the dwelling of God is with man, and he will live with them."*

THE PASSOVER AND THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

- *The Passover in Exodus 12 shows God protecting His people through the blood of the lamb—this rescue becomes central to Jewish identity.*
- *Jesus fulfills this story: John 1:29 calls Him "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.", Jesus' death happens at Passover, symbolizing the way back to God's presence.*
- *The sacrificial system in Leviticus served to cleanse the people so God's presence could remain with them.*
- *Hebrews 10:4 says the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, but Jesus fulfills this once for all: Hebrews 10:19–22: We can now enter God's presence with confidence.*

THE MESSIAH

- *Promised in Isaiah 9:6–7 and Daniel 7:13–14 as a King who would reign forever and bring people into God's kingdom.*
- *Jesus says the Kingdom is already among us (Luke 17:21), restoring relationship with God.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

- *Isaiah 53 describes a servant who would bring salvation through suffering, not power.*
- *Jesus fulfills this role as the Servant who bears our sins: Matthew*

20:28: "The Son of Man came... to give His life as a ransom for many."

TEMPLE AND GOD'S PRESENCE

- *The temple was where heaven met earth.*
- *Jesus says in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days," referring to His body.*
- *Jesus replaces the temple—He is the new meeting place between God and humanity.*
- *The Bible ends with Revelation 21–22, where no temple is needed because God's presence fills everything: "They will see His face."*
- *From Genesis to Revelation, the story is God's desire to dwell with His people and bring us back into His presence through Jesus.*

12. ***Theological Coherency of the New Testament***

The Gospels as the Climax of the Biblical Story: Five Themes Fulfilled in Jesus

Let's take a step back and look at the big picture of the Bible—because when we do, we find that the Gospels are not just four isolated accounts about Jesus. They are the climax of a unified story that had been unfolding for centuries.

GOD'S PRESENCE

From the Garden of Eden to the Tabernacle, to the Temple, the central longing was for God to dwell with His people. The Gospels show us that Jesus is called "Immanuel," meaning "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). John writes, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14). In Jesus, God's presence is no longer limited to a building—it's personal.

THE PASSOVER AND THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

The Exodus and the sacrifices established that sin requires atonement and freedom comes through blood. When Jesus is crucified during Passover, John calls Him "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He is the fulfillment of the system—it all pointed to Him.

THE MESSIAH

The Old Testament prophets promised a coming king from David's line who would rule with justice and restore God's people. In the Gospels, Jesus doesn't just claim to be the Messiah—His actions and teachings confirm it. He heals the sick, commands nature, and fulfills prophecies made centuries earlier.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Isaiah 53 speaks of one who would suffer for the sins of others, though innocent. Jesus' death on the cross is not a tragedy—it's a mission.

TEMPLE AND GOD'S PRESENCE

13. ***Examining the Quranic Gospel (The Injil)***

WHAT IS THE QURANIC INJIL? HISTORICAL RELIABILITY: QURANIC VERSION OF THE GOSPEL (THE INJIL)

"And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous." Surah Al-Ma'idah (Quran 5.46)

WHO WERE THE DISCIPLES? THE QUR'AN DOESN'T SAY

But when Jesus felt [persistence in] disbelief from them, he said, 'Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?' The disciples said, 'We are supporters for Allah. We have believed in Allah and testify that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].'" Surah Al-Saff (Quran 61.14), Sahih International

CRUCIFIXION IN THE QUR'AN: NO NAMES, NO CONTEXT, NO EYEWITNESSES

"And [for] their saying, 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.' And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain." Surah An-Nisa Quran 4.157

THEOLOGICAL COHERENCY

THE INJIL IN THE QUR'AN: MISSING THE STORYLINE OF SCRIPTURE

THE CANONICAL GOSPELS: FULFILLMENT, NOT FRAGMENT

The Gospels present Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

They continue themes such as:

- *God's Presence*
- *Passover & Sacrifice*
- *The Promised King*
- *The Suffering Servant*
- *The Temple*

Jesus comes not to abolish, but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

- *THE QUR'ANIC INJIL: A DISCONNECTED BOOK*

- *Described as a book given directly to Jesus.*
- *Not a narrative, not rooted in Israel's story.*
- *Never quoted or explained in the Qur'an.*
- *Lacks historical and theological detail.*

14. ***Conclusion and purpose of the presentation***

Which Source Tells the True Story of Jesus?

To examine which source—the Qur'an or the four Gospels—gives the true and authentic

account of Jesus' life and ministry.

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

The canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are based on real history, written by eyewitnesses or those close to them.

The Gospels fit within the unified story of the Bible, fulfilling key Old Testament themes:

- *God's Presence*
- *The Passover and Sacrifice*
- *Kingship and Messiah*
- *The Suffering Servant*
- *The Temple*

WHAT ABOUT THE QUR'ANIC INJIL?

The Injil in the Qur'an is:

- *Not a narrative*
- *Not historical*
- *Not connected to the Old Testament*
- *Treated more like a book revealed to Jesus, rather than a record of His life and teaching*

WHY THIS MATTERS

- *The Gospels are truly Good News—they show Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.*
- *The Qur'anic Injil lacks both historical grounding and theological richness.*

OUR RESPONSE

- *Share the Gospels boldly and effectively with Muslims.*
- *When Muslims claim the Injil was lost or changed, respond with confidence.*
- *The four Gospels are authentic, trustworthy, and full of hope.*

Final Word: Let's not be silent!

The Gospel is too good to keep to ourselves.