

THE VERSE OF STONING IN THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'AN

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ISKANDAR 'ABDU'L-MASIH, AND
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INTRODUCTION

WE believe that there is no one in the whole Muslim world who has not heard the oft-repeated accusation of Muslims directed against Christians, and their claim, that we have corrupted the Bible by additions and omissions. These accusations, unworthy though they are of any attention, have often been refuted by Christians, and we do not believe that any learned Muslim is sincerely convinced of the accusation which he directs against us. Indeed, he is only driven to it by his inability to reconcile the Bible and the Qur'an. The latter testifies to the former as being the inspired Book of God; but then, what about the clear divergence between the two? Is he to believe in the Qur'an's witness to the Bible and deny the Qur'an itself—his own book? Or, is he to deny the witness of the Qur'an, and so the Qur'an itself? So, to avoid the hopeless difficulty, he accuses the Christians of having corrupted the Bible.

With regard to this accusation Muslims may be divided into three classes: those who know that the accusation is utterly false; those who are convinced that it is true; and, lastly, those who do not know whether it is false or true. The first party know the truth; the second ignore it; and the third are driven to the accusation by the inertia of habit. Their ancestors made the accusation, and they simply follow in their steps, irrespective of whether the accusation is well founded or baseless. And it is to the last two parties that we address ourselves, seeing that the first knows the truth, but only disputes for the sake of disputing.

But before proceeding to discuss the question in detail, we will ask our brother Muslims to answer the following questions:—

- (1) Was the Bible in the days of Muhammad sound and true?
- (2) If it was true (and there is no escape from admitting the fact) was it corrupted after the days of Muhammad?
- (3) Can Muslims produce a copy of the Bible whose date can be traced to the days of Muhammad (or farther back) which is different from the present Bible?
- (4) Is it conceivable that the Jews and Christians should agree to corrupt the Bible, knowing that they are as widely separated from each other as the two poles?

We believe that there is no answer to these questions.

Our object in publishing this book is threefold. We want, first, to prove (though such an axiom hardly needs to be proved) that the Verse of Stoning has been omitted from the Qur'an, not from the Bible, thus turning the accusation against our Muslim friends themselves! secondly, to prove (and again such an axiom need hardly be proved) that the verse does exist in the Taurat; and thirdly, to narrate a story, in connection with this same Verse of Stoning, which occurred in the days of

Muhammad, and which in itself proves that the Taurat was then, and therefore is now, free from any corruption whatsoever.

CHAPTER I

THE VERSE OF STONING IN THE QUR'AN

READERS of the tafasir of the Qur'an must have noticed often that time after time the commentators, wishing to give concrete examples of the alleged corruption of the Bible, dismiss the subject perfunctorily by the sentence which, after a time, becomes quite like a conventional phrase: 'As the Verse of Stoning and the allusions to the Prophet.'¹

Now with regard to the 'allusions to the Prophet', had they really existed in the Taurat, the Jews would not have dared to tamper with them, so great was their respect to God's Book. It will be remembered that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah with other allusions to the Messiah (كنعت المسيح) still exists in the Jewish Bible, although they are clear references to Christ and the way He was to sacrifice His life as an atonement. Is not this conclusive proof that the Jews have too great a respect for the Book of God to attempt to corrupt it, even when a text in it tells controversially against them?

That the Verse of Stoning is in the Bible and never was omitted from it we shall show in another chapter. But in this chapter we are going to make the amazing discovery that it has been dropped, not from the Bible, but from the Qur'an!

It will be remembered that the penalty incurred by adulterers was first perpetual imprisonment, as in the verse:—

'Shut them (the adulteresses) up within their houses till death release them, or God makes some way for them' [Suratu'n-Nisa' (iv) 19].

For this penalty there was then substituted another, i.e. a hundred lashes;² and this again was in turn replaced by stoning. But that Verse of Stoning has gone from the Qur'an.

If it be argued that the Verse of Stoning was not recorded, when the Qur'an was edited, only because it could not be testified to by two (or more) witnesses, we will say that the verse was known to several of the Companions (Ashab) who could and did testify to its genuineness. We give below some traditions to this effect:—

(1) Abu 'Ubaid quotes a tradition coming down from ibn Jaish, saying: 'Ubai said, "How many verses is the Suratu-'l-Ahzab (xxxiii)?" I said, "Seventy-two or seventy-three." He said, "It was as

¹ كنعت النبي وآية الرجم

² Suratu'n-Nur (xxiv) 1.

long as the Stiratu'l-Baqara (ii) and we used to read in it the Verse of Stoning." I said, "And what was the Verse of Stoning?" He said, "The married man and the married woman when they commit adultery, they stone without doubt¹ as a punishment from God."

(2) We read in the 'Kitabu'l-Burhan' that 'Umar said, 'Were I not afraid lest people should say that I have added to the Qur'an I would have recorded it (i.e. the Verse of Stoning).'²

(3) Another tradition is traced back to Abu Imama ibn Sahal to the effect that his aunt said: 'The Prophet . . . read to us the Verse of Stoning, saying, "If an old man and an old woman commit adultery stone them both for the pleasure they have sought."

(4) Al-Hakim quotes another tradition from ibn Sait saying: 'When Zaid ibn Thabit and Sa'id ibn al-'As were writing out the Qur'an, they came to this verse (i.e. Verse of Stoning), Zaid said, "I have heard the Prophet say, if an old man and old woman commit adultery stone them both."

(5) According to the same tradition, 'Umar said: 'When this verse came down I went to the Prophet and said, "May I record this verse?" " But it seems he disliked it . . . '

(G) An-Nisa'i quotes a tradition similar to the previous one about 'Umar.

(7) In the 'Itqan' (on Fada'ilu'l-Qur'an) ibn Durais cites a tradition ascribed to ibn Aslam to the effect that 'Umar once addressed a large audience and said: 'Doubt not concerning stoning, for it is lawful. I would have written the Verse of Stoning in the Qur'an, but Ubai ibn Ka'b said to me, "Dost thou not remember when thou once camest unto me while I was asking the Prophet to recite the verse to me, and he pushed me in my chest? And thou saidst unto me, 'Dost thou ask the Prophet to recite the verse to you when people are committing adultery like beasts?'"³

(8) 'Ayesha, whose testimony, though a woman's, counts whole, not half, knew of this verse at and after the death of Muhammad, as we shall see.

Thus it is evident that the witnesses of the Verse of Stoning were the most important of the Companions, such as 'Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, 'Umar ibnu'l-Khattab, one of his successors, Zaid ibn Thabit, his secretary and editor, with others—very many more than the quorum of two required to authenticate any verse.

The assumption is that the Verse was caused to be forgotten.

Some Muslims claim that this verse was caused by God to be forgotten, as God has the right to cancel or abrogate any verse. The Qur'an says: 'And whatever verse we cancel or cause thee to

¹ الشيخ والشيخة إذا زنيا فأرجوهما البتة

² See Nöldeke, *Geschichtes des Qorans*, p. 194, and Sell's *Rescensions of the Qur'an*, p. 6, note 3.

³

وأخرج ابن الخريس في فضل القرآن عن يعلى بن حكيم عن زيد أن عمر خطب الناس فقال: لا تشكوا في الرجم فإنه حق ولقد هممت بكتبه في الصحف فسألت بن أبي كعب فقال: أليس أتيتني وأنا أستقرعاً رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فدفعت في صدري وقلت تستقرنه آية الرجم وهم يتسأفون تسأفون الحجر" (اللائقان)

Jalaluddin As-Suyuti (d. 1505), *Al-'Itqan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an*, p. 351.

forget, we bring a better or its like [Suratu'l-Baqara (ii) 100]. Two arguments are advanced by Muslims to this effect:—

(1) In the 'Kitabu'l-Yanbu' ibn Zafar denies that the verse is abrogated in text. 'The witness of one man, (i.e. 'Umar),' he says, 'does not prove that the verse is genuine. The truth is that the verse is of the category of the to-be-forgotten and not the to-be-abrogated verses, the difference between the two categories being that a verse which may be made forgotten exists in effect.' We cannot, however, reconcile this with the fact that the verse in question was remembered, and that by more than one of the Companions.

(2) If God really wanted the verse to be forgotten, He would of course have abrogated its effect. But in this case we see that though the text has been dropped, its sentence still survives, and has been repeatedly applied to adulterers.

This proves that Muhammad was not 'caused to forget' the verse, but simply disliked the recording of it, and he consequently discouraged 'Umar from recording it, and pushed Ubai in his chest when the latter asked him to recite it to him. Ibn Majah said that the remainder of Suratu'l-Ahzab (xxxiii) was written on a leather roll and placed underneath the bed of the Prophet. When Muhammad died, 'Ayesha accompanied his funeral to the grave, and on her return she found that a goat had eaten the roll with all the inspired verses it contained, including this same Verse of Stoning! Apart from the strangeness of this story, it is yet another clear proof that the verse actually existed in writing till the very death of Muhammad. How then can it be alleged that he was 'caused to forget it'? He, in fact, remembered it only too well, and so did many of his Companions.

CHAPTER II

THE VERSE OF STONING AND THE COMPANIONS

There are three explanations to which Muslims resort in their attempt to account for the loss of the verse, namely:—

(1) That it was abrogated. But where is the abrogating verse. On the contrary, as we have seen it was the other verses about adultery that were abrogated by this verse.

(2) That it was forgotten. But we have already seen that it was neither forgotten by the Prophet nor by the Companions. And wherein, may we ask, would the wisdom be in revealing a verse and then blotting it from memory, especially when the effect of the verse was intended to remain?

(3) That it was neglected. In his 'Sharhu'l-Minhaj', ibn Hajar says that the reason for abrogating the text and for keeping its effect was to lighten its burden, which Muslims think a heavy one, nay the heaviest. In other words the believer was not to be deterred from this sin, for he was to be kept in ignorance of the fact that God had sent down a text, which invokes the most horrible judgement on adulterers. We fail to see the mercy, wisdom or justice of this. The only true explanation, therefore, is that the verse was disliked, neglected, then dropped out of the Qur'an.

We see from what has gone before that the verse was read not only in the days of Muhammad, but in the khaliphate of Abu Bakr also, by the evidence of the fact that 'Umar would fain have recorded it in the Qur'an. And it was only through sheer fear of blame that 'Umar desisted from inserting it lest he should be blamed for 'adding to the Book of God'. We wonder, however, that he should claim to be the sole witness to the verse when we know that many others were cognizant of it. So either 'Umar, or the other Companions, did not speak the truth in this most serious matter which affects our whole estimate of the bona fides of those who edited the Qur'an.

But stranger still is the fact that the effect of this verse, though its text does not exist, is still in force and is confirmed by the sunnat.¹ This is seen from the following:—

1. Az-Zuhri quotes a tradition from ibn 'Abbas saying: 'And 'Umar said, "I am afraid lest a time should come when people will say, 'We do not find stoning in the Book of God'," and thus they would err by neglecting a command sent down from God saying: "If an old man and an old woman commit adultery stone them." The Apostle did stone and we followed his example.'

¹ For the meaning of sunnat see *Faith of Islam* (3rd ed.) pp. 18-26.

Certainly the words, 'the Apostle did stone and we followed his example' are evidence that stoning was a sunnat order, or a sentence passed by sacred law on adulterers and adulteresses.

2. In his commentary on Suratu'n-Nur (xxiv), ar-Razi quotes a tradition from 'Ibado to the effect that Muhammad gave a tradition which (1) confirmed the sunnat law of stoning. For he said: 'Take it from me. God has opened a way for them. If a virgin commits adultery she is to be punished (and so her accomplice too) by a hundred lashes and one year's banishment. In the case of the married it is to be a hundred lashes and stoning.'

3. A man once accused his wife to Muhammad, saying that she was an adulteress. The Prophet, turning to one of his men around said 'Go to this woman, and if she confesses, stone her.'

4. All commentators are agreed (and their agreement—ijma'—is a sunnat) that the sanity and maturity of the criminal are necessary conditions for prosecuting him. Thus neither a minor nor a maniac can be prosecuted for adultery.

5. Ash-Shafi'i and Abu Yusuf claim that Islam¹ is not a necessary condition for stoning. The former quotes a tradition from ibn 'Umar that the Prophet stoned a Jew and a Jewess who committed adultery.

6. Imam Abu Hanifa quotes another tradition from Barida el Aslami saying: 'We (the Companions) said to each other, "Had not Ma'iz confessed four times the Prophet would not have stoned him".'

7, 8. The Imams Ash-Shafi'i and Malik claim that the Imam is free to attend or not to attend the stoning of the adulterer. Witnesses are also at liberty to do so.

9. Abu Hanifa says that if adultery is established by evidence, the witnesses must first commence stoning, to be followed by the Imam, then by the whole spectators. But if it is established by the confession of the criminal, the Imam must first commence stoning, then the spectators. Abu Hanifa's reason for this is that the Prophet ordered Ma'iz and al-Ghamidah to be stoned, but he himself was not present.

The foregoing, however, is only a small portion of the evidence which proves that the sunnat, the ijma' (agreement of the Companions) and the Imams consider stoning an indisputable sentence that should be passed on the adulterer and the adulteress. Where, then, is the verse confirming such a sentence? If Muhammad really wished (as it is said) to lighten the verse of stoning, it would have been much more to the point surely to abrogate its effect and preserve its text, for then the coming generations would see how mercifully God had treated them by abrogating so terrible a sentence.

Now, however, people are punished for a crime against which no explicit textual prohibition exists. This so far from being a mercy obviously only adds to severity and injustice.

¹ i.e. that the offender need not necessarily be a Muslim.

The true explanation is now obvious; the verse was from the outset unpopular among Muhammadans from the Founder of Islam himself down to the humblest Companion, except 'Umar.

How much Muhammad disliked it we see from the dispute which led him to push Ubai in his chest, in a way indicating displeasure. How much the Companions disliked it is shown by the fact that, though at least eight persons (and certainly many more) knew of it, not one could be got to support 'Umar in putting it forward for inclusion in Abu Bakr's edition of the Qur'an.

Now if Muslims accuse us of having corrupted the Bible for the simple reason that a Jew placed his hand over the Verse of Stoning (see the next chapter) so as to conceal it from Muhammad's eyes, how much more could we accuse them of having wilfully and actually corrupted the Qur'an by omitting the verse in question?

CHAPTER III

THE VERSE OF STONING IN THE TAURAT IN THE TIME OF MUHAMMAD

THERE is an important text in Suratu'l-Ma'ida, (v.) 47-8, which has to do with a well-known and highly significant story; and both text and story are vitally related to our subject, for they reveal the existence of an uncorrupted Taurat, including the very verse now in question, in the lifetime of Muhammad. If the present copies of the Taurat were without this verse, the situation would indeed be serious for us, for it would show that the Bible had been tampered with since those days. But seeing this is not the case, as we shall show in the fourth chapter, the text and story that we are now going to examine become a valuable link connecting the uncorrupted Taurat of to-day with the uncorrupted Taurat of Muhammad's day, and so on back into the preceding ages.

Here is the text in question:—

But how shall they make thee their judge, since they possess already the Law (Taurat) in which are the behests of God, *and have not obeyed it?* After this, they will turn their backs; but such are not believers.

Verily, we have sent down the Law (Taurat) wherein are guidance and light. By it did the prophets judge the Jews; and the doctors and the teachers judged by that portion of the Book of God, of which they were the keepers and the witnesses.

The occasion of the promulgation of this text is very certain. The incident is thus given by all the commentators, and very picturesque it is. We summarize it as follows:—

A breach of the Seventh Commandment was committed by two Jews of Arabia, both of them being in wedlock. The Mosaic penalty for this is stoning, but the offenders being influential were able to escape the extreme penalty and were assigned the milder one of scourging. The case was referred to Muhammad, it being hoped that his ignorance of the Taurat or his claim to have promulgated another law, would support the mild decision. The story goes that Muhammad sent for the two sons of Suriya, who were two of the most learned men in the Jewish community, and were conversant with Hebrew, and demanded of them, on oath, what the true Mosaic precept was on the subject, and they, in spite of the furious gestures of the Jews standing round, told the truth, and indicated the Verse of Stoning in the Taurat. Ibn Ishaq, in his biography of Muhammad, adds the detail that a Jewish reader actually laid his hand on that incriminating verse, whereupon, one named Abdu'llah ibn Salam struck away the hand of the reader saying: "There! Prophet of God, there is the Verse of Stoning, which he refuses to read to thee!" To which Muhammad replied:

'Woe to you Jews! what makes you reject the judgement of God when it is in your very hands!' The end of the story is that orders were given for the stoning of the guilty pair, and the text, above translated was promulgated, in which Muhammad refers to the work with which Prophet, Rabbi, and Priest (which titles, according to the commentators, are a generalized description of the two sons of Suriya) were divinely entrusted with the guarding of the word of God (the Taurat) and witnessing to it.

Such is the incident, and we draw from it the following conclusions:—

1. We have here a most astonishing proof that no Jew dared to tamper with his sacred text. Here we have a single text greatly disliked by the Jewish community, and especially their influential people. So much disliked was it that they had mutually consented not to observe it. Now, what would have been more natural than for them to have obliterated it, if (as Muslims to-day are never wearied of asserting) it was so easy for the heads of the Jewish or Christian community to change, not merely one text, but hundreds of texts, yea, substitute a whole false book for a true one! Yet, here we see that they did not dare to tamper with even one small unpopular text! They left it.

standing, and the utmost they could do was to attempt to conceal it by placing the hand over the text (according to ibn Ishaq's version), or by lying about the meaning of the Hebrew, or by refusing to find the text, or denying its existence, or otherwise.

If, therefore, the tampering with the text, in the smallest particular, was impossible in Muhammad's time, what shall we say of those who falsely claim it was wholly perverted before his time, or in his time, or after his time either!

2. We have here the spectacle of a written Taurat known and circulated among the Jews of the Arabian peninsula; we see a community largely educated and able to read it themselves, and knowing its contents, whether they chose to observe them or not. If, then, this was the case in Arabia, it must have been so, too, wherever else the Jews were, for there is not a shred of evidence to be produced that elsewhere the Jews—in Egypt, Syria, Byzantium, or the West, etc.—were more ignorant, or slacker about keeping their law pure. On the contrary, the text bears witness that their Rabbis and Priests in general, as a class, were specially raised up by God to do this sentinel work. Therefore, the text of the Taurat was as pure all over the Jewish world as it was in Arabia in Muhammad's day.

3. Not only so, but the text and the commentators make it abundantly clear that not only the Jewish leaders, such as the sons of Suriya, but also the Prophets, including (they say) Muhammad himself, were specially commissioned by God¹ to keep intact the Taurat, and preserve it from 'concealment', 'alteration', 'substitution', 'perversion', and from being 'forgotten' or 'lost' (all of these words are used by the commentators). Are we, then, really to say that one and all, including Muhammad, had failed, were failing, or would fail, in their divine task

4. Let no one pervert obvious truth by the subterfuge that a part of the Book was correct in those days, and that the Rabbis, and Priests, and Prophets, and Muhammad himself, were charged to

¹ 'Of which they were the keepers and the witnesses'; i.e. God entrusted them with it. —Jalalu'd-Din. 'God laid on them the duty of keeping it'. —Zamakhshari. Cf. Baidawi, who speaks of them as 'guardians, not allowing (any) to alter it'.

keep that correct part. This opinion goes against every fact. For, first, Muhammad always alludes to the Book, not to any part of it. He never gave a hint at this or any other time that the Book, as a Book, was corrupted, and that he only recognized a part of it. Had the case been so, what gross ignorance or negligence were it, on his part, not to mention the fact, nay, not to blaze it abroad in language incapable of being misunderstood! Again, not a single commentator countenances this view!

Baidawi says: 'Because of God's command to them to keep His Book from being lost or perverted.' And Zamakhshari: '(They were) guardians, lest it (the Book) should be changed.' And Jalalu'd-Din: 'Lest they should change it (the Book).' And Tabari: 'They condemned them on the authority of the Book of God which was sent down on His Prophet Moses.' And Razi, the strongest of them all, says that these divine guardians (Rabbis, Priests, Prophets, and Muhammad himself), were 'witnesses that everything in the Taurat was truth and of God' —meaning, of course, the actual Book current among the Jews of that day. 'As though,' continues Razi, 'God were addressing the people saying, "Beware that ye pervert not my book through fear."'

5. This passage fixes the meaning tahrif and tabdil (perversion and substitution) wherever they occur. They clearly mean, not falsification of text, as we have seen, but concealment of it, or lying about its contents, or twisting it with false interpretations. On this point the commentators are unanimous. So Razi:—

'The keeping of God's book is of two kinds; keeping it from being forgotten and keeping it from being lost. Now God put upon the 'Ulama the keeping of the Book in both kinds, namely, (1) that they should keep it in their hearts and learn it with their tongues, and (2) that they should not lose its judgements, nor neglect its laws.'

More remarkable still is the tradition which Razi quotes from ibn 'Abbas, an uncle of Muhammad: 'The Taurat and Injil were books which had reached a degree of celebrity and universal traditional consent (tawatur) which rendered impossible such a thing (as corruption) in their case.'

Impossible! We thank ibn 'Abbas for that word, and we thank God; for, if the corruption of the Bible was impossible before or during Muhammad's day, it has become more and more impossible since that time, owing to the ever-increasing area of the circulation of the Book, and the bitterness between the sects, all of which profess the Taurat and each of which would watch like lynxes for any sign of tampering on the part of another; to say nothing of the total silence of history about so marvellous a conspiracy, of all the Jewish and Christian leaders in the world, to change 'be it remembered' not one text only, but a whole Book! Impossible! we echo again with ibn 'Abbas!

So, then, like a rock stands the truth that the Taurat sold to-day is the very Book pointed to by Muhammad that day in Madina, and expounded to him by ibn Suriya. And let us thank God for the evidence and the witness, and in it is this Verse of Stoning as we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE VERSE OF STONING IN THE TAURAT

IT is clear from the previous chapter that the Verse of Stoning was in the Qur'an whence it was dropped, and that the Qur'an witnessed to it as existing in the Taurat in its day, and it has never been omitted from the Bible since then. For, notwithstanding all the accusations of the Muhammadans, the verse still exists in the Bible! It has been in it ever since Moses recorded it. It occurs in Deut. xxii. 22-4.

If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then shall they both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and the man find her in the city and lie with her; Then shall ye bring them both out unto the gate of the city and shall stone them with stones that they die.

This is the Verse of Stoning, nay the Verses of Stoning, which Muhammadans accuse Christians of having omitted! But the verses have remained sound and perfect, and will forever remain so, even if the heavens and the earth perish.¹ But what makes the story stranger still is the fact that Muhammadans accuse us of the very same thing of which they themselves are guilty. We have therefore met them on their own ground, and we may fairly ask the just and the thoughtful Muhammadan to ponder over this strange story, and to act in accordance with the clear lesson it teaches.

¹ In the Injil (St. John viii. 1-11) we find the proof that these verses were in the Taurat in the time of al-Masih. The same passage also shows the lines along which Christians, following their founder, deal with sinners of this class.