
Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān

Gospel

In Christianity, the “good news” preached about Jesus Christ; in the Qur'ān, part of the divine message given to **Jesus** (q.v.). Of the twelve times the **Gospel** (*al- injīl*) is mentioned in the Qur'ān, in nine of them it occurs in conjunction with the mention of the Torah (q.v.; *al- tawrāt*), as a scripture sent down by God. Together with **wisdom** (q.v.; *al- ḥikma*), the Torah and the **Gospel** appear to comprise the ‘scripture’ (*al- kitāb*) that the Qur'ān says God taught to Jesus (Q 3:48; 5:110). Twice the Qur'ān says explicitly that God brought Jesus the **Gospel** (Q 5:46; 57:27). And once the Qur'ān instructs the ‘ People of the **Gospel**’ to judge in accordance with that which God sent down to them.

In a number of passages the Qur'ān clearly presumes in its audience a prior knowledge of **Gospel** characters and **narratives** (q.v.). In some passages the Qur'ān closely parallels narratives to be found in the canonical, Christian **Gospel** (cf. e.g. Q 3:45-7); in others one finds some motifs familiar from the apocryphal Gospels of the Christians, or other sources of early Christian lore (cf. e.g. Q 5:110). A number of qur'ānic sayings of Jesus, and narratives about him, have no known parallels in extant Christian texts. What is more, the Qur'ān clearly teaches that the future coming of Muḥammad was written in both the Torah and the **Gospel** and was foretold by Jesus himself (cf. Q 7:157; 61:6).

The Arabic word *injīl* is ultimately derived from the Greek *evangelion*, but the exact philological path by which the term in its present form came into Arabic is unclear (see [FOREIGN VOCABULARY](#)). Noting that all but one of the mentions of the **Gospel** in the Qur'ān are in sūras traditionally designated as ‘Medinan’, some scholars have suggested that the Ethiopic form of the word, *wangēl*, is not only philologically, but chronologically the most likely ancestor of the Arabic term.

Conceptually, in the Qur'ānic view, the **Gospel** is a scripture that God gave to Jesus, on the order of the Torah that God gave to Moses (q.v.), and even on the order of the Qur'ān that God gave to Muḥammad (cf. Q 9:111). Contrariwise, in the usual Christian view, the **Gospel** is the proclamation in the human community of the ‘good news’ of the salvation of all human beings that God has accomplished in Christ. Most Christians have believed that the **Gospel** was recorded under divine **inspiration** by the four evangelists in the four canonical texts: the **Gospel** according to Matthew, the **Gospel** according to Mark, the **Gospel** according to Luke, and the **Gospel** according to John, all of them written originally in Greek. Qur'ānic uses of the term *injīl*, however, are all in the singular and betray no awareness of multiple Gospels. The conceptual differences between the Christian and the

Islamic views of the **Gospel** soon gave rise among Muslim commentators to the charge that Christians have 'distorted' (*al-taḥrīf*) the original **Gospel** of which the Qur'ān speaks, in the way that the Qur'ān suggests the Jews distorted the Torah. Some early Muslim writers say that the original **Gospel** was written in Hebrew, or in Aramaic, both of them languages in use in the Jewish community at the time of Jesus. As for the **Gospel** in Arabic, while one strand of Islamic tradition credits Waraqa b. Nawfal with a translation of the text into Arabic, the remaining textual evidence suggests that the earliest translations were made after the rise of Islam, from Greek originals, by Christian monks in Palestine, in the late eighth century.

There is some evidence that the term **Gospel** was also sometimes used in the early Islamic period to indicate the whole New Testament, in the same way that the name of the Torah was used not only for the Pentateuch, but for all the books of the Jewish scriptures. While passages were liberally quoted from the Christian **Gospel** by some early Muslim writers, such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292/905), among others, in general, early Muslim writers referred to **Gospel** characters and **Gospel** narratives in the forms in which they appear in the Qur'ān or in other early Islamic texts. Many sayings of Jesus current in Islamic texts have no known Christian counterparts.

A text called the **Gospel of Barnabas** has had a wide circulation in modern times. It was discovered in an Italian manuscript in Amsterdam in 1709. Since its translation into Arabic in the early 20th century, some have claimed that it preserves the original **Gospel**, of which the Qur'ān speaks. In fact, the **Gospel of Barnabas** has been shown to have its origins in the western Mediterranean world, probably in Spain, in the 16th century.

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