

ALI 576: Historical Reliability of the Qur'an, Ses. 1

Shaykh Murtaza Bachoo

Academy for Learning Islam | ALI 576

Rabi al-Akhar 1442 | November 2020

Outline

1. What is Historical Reliability?
2. Understanding the Theological Issues.
3. A Brief Overview of Qur'anic Stories.
4. Stories of the Qur'an: Real or Fictional?
5. Rational and Scriptural Arguments
6. Conclusion and Questions

What is Historical Reliability?

- History and the Past
- History is our construction and analysis of the past.
- History is a narrative of the past. In the narrative, details are left out due to:
 - Necessity
 - Political, cultural and/or ideological reasons.
- Historicity looks at how accurately history describes the past based on available evidence.
- We want to look at how accurately the Qur'an describes the past.

Understanding the Theological Issues

- If the stories of the Qur'an are not deemed to be factually accurate, it creates the following issues:
 - Who is the author of the Qur'an? Is it Allah (S), the all-Knowing or a human being?
 - Is the Qur'an Divine revelation or Divine inspiration?
 - Should we read all the stories of the Qur'an as factual, or should we read them in a symbolic manner?

The Stories of the Qur'an

- The stories of the Qur'an have been questioned in the following three ways:

Issue	Example
Important moments of human history not mentioned in the Qur'an	Greek and Roman Civilizations, Chinese Civilization, First Nations etc.
Important stories in the Qur'an not mentioned in reliable history	As-hab al-Kahf, Ya'juj and Ma'juj, Flood of Nuh (a), Creation of Adam (a).
Important details mentioned in the Qur'an disputed by historical records.	The mention of Haman, Ezra in Jewish history, Raising of Isa (a).

Stories of the Qur'an: Real or Fictional?

- Ayat. Hadi Ma'rifat mentions three opinions amongst Muslims:
 1. The stories of the Qur'an are real.
 2. The stories of the Qur'an are symbolic. Like fables, they seek only to promote ideals and values.
 3. The stories of the Qur'an are a tool of oration. The Qur'an neither asserts or negates these stories. It only chooses to use them to develop thought and values.

Stories of the Qur'an are Factual: Rational

The Values of the Qur'an

- The values and beliefs of the Qur'an are real and not arbitrary.

With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend
(17:105)

- Hence the stories used to establish these values should be real and not arbitrary.
- Ayat. Ma'rifat: the loss of morals is in part due to the false stories on which they are established.

Stories of the Qur'an are Factual: Rational

The Audience

- The audience of the Qur'an are all of mankind.

We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind, but most people do not know. (34:28)

- If the audience was limited to the people of Arabia, one could argue for using their stories.
- However such stories are not meaningful for people outside of Arabia.

Stories of the Qur'an are Factual: Scriptural

- The Qur'an itself asserts that is haqq (truth) and that batil (falsehood) has no place in it.

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ

We relate to you their account in truth. (18:13)

لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَ لَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a [gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise, all-laudable.

(41:42)

Stories of the Qur'an: Allamah Tabatabai

Such a claim is wrong. This is because the Qur'an is neither a book of history, nor a fictional narration. Rather it is a book that cannot be influenced [by falsehood], in which falsehood has no place for entry. It is the word of a God who speaks nothing but the truth, and in order to reach the truth, it does not seek assistance from falsehood. How can it be imagined that the objective would be the unconditional truth, whilst falsehood is able to influence it in some way?