



THE SCRIPTURES OF ABRAHAM: THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'AN

Quayle Bible Collection
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Special thanks to those who contributed to the production of this exhibit including:

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People of the Book

Abraham, who is the father of both Isaac and Ishmael, is an important figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because of this, the three religions are often known as the Abrahamic Faiths. Other than their scriptural similarities, all three recognize the importance of Jerusalem, with Muslims historically praying towards Jerusalem before switching to Mecca. Muslims recognize the connection of scriptures and refer to Jews and Christians as the “People of the Book,” but many Jews and Christians might not be aware of the links. Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jesus, Noah, Adam, and many more figures found in the Bible are also found in the Qur’an. Mary, mother of Jesus, is mentioned more in the Qur’an than in the Bible. There are quite a few years that separate some of these books, especially the Old Testament/Tanak and the Qur’an. The New Testament is only about 300-500 years older than the Qur’an, which was canonized around 650 CE. There are a lot of similarities and differences between the two texts, and there are a lot of similarities in how the texts were traditionally treated by followers. The 2024-2025 Quayle Bible Collection exhibit will explore these connections by showing how the Bible and the Qur’an are related, including their shared stories and differences. The exhibit will also feature Qur’ans from Bishop Quayle’s original collection showcasing his interest in the history of religions other than Christianity. Two of the cases featured were designed by students in Baker University’s Museum Studies courses and others were researched previously by museum interns.

Scriptural Connections

The north wall contains additional examinations of similarities and differences found between the Bible and Qur'an. There are so many connections between the two that this exhibit is unable to display all of them. As a result, we are highlighting ones that might be of interest to the public, especially students. Some of these should come as no surprise considering each of the traditions originates in the same region with people of similar culture, who traded ideas and traditions with each other. Even though the religions have moved away, the heart of all three traditions is Middle Eastern.

Sacred Texts – Holy Items

With the mass production of Bibles after the invention of the printing press, the concept of the Bible as a sacred object became devalued by some Christians, especially many branches of Protestant Christianity. However, Jews continue to see the object itself as sacred, even burying them when they become disrepair. The pointer with a little hand is called a *yad* which allows you to read the Hebrew without touching the parchment. Similarly, the Qur'an is supposed to be treated with respect. As the Arabic reads on the case of the Qur'an on the right, *la yamasuh ala almutaharūn*, only those who have washed their hands may touch the book. The book is never supposed to be placed on the ground and some believe you should not sit with the soles of your feet pointed towards it.

Evolution of Semitic Languages

Semitic languages exist as some of the earliest written languages in the world, with Akkadian and Babylonian using cuneiform, the oldest writing system. All Semitic languages

have similar meanings of words, especially Arabic and Hebrew. Words like angel (*malakh*) and soul (*ruah*) are the same in both languages. Both also share common writing system ancestors. When Aramaic became the lingua franca of the region, Hebrew and Arabic abandoned their more pictographic writing system. While Hebrew adopted from Aramaic the block writing system we know today, Arabic would go on to adopt the script of Syriac Aramaic. What is presented in this case is the development of that writing system with Babylonian cuneiform in the center. Hebrew with the Aramaic alphabet on the left and Syriac Aramaic on the right.

Organization of Scriptures

When the Bible was first written, the text was in scroll form without any chapter or verse notation. There were gaps in the text to mark the separations between sections. By the time the Qur'an was created, the codex had become popular and individual books in the Bible were beginning to be marked and given names. However, the verses in the Bible would not be modernized until the 1400s. On the left are leaves of a Qur'an and a Bible. Both are handwritten with guiding lines, and while the Qur'an does not have numbered verses or *ayat*, it has gold circles marking the individual *ayah*. The Geneva Bible on the right is the first Bible in English to contain the modern versification. When the Qur'an was canonized 19 years after the prophet Muhammad's death, it was based on oral retellings of a text that's main genre were sermons. As a result, the organization of the Qur'an is quite different than the Bible, with chapters, or *surahs*, organized based on length, and named after some element within the story. The longest surah is the second one and is named the cow because the animal makes an appearance in the chapter. Some of the chapters themselves were transmitted in Mecca and some in

Medina, with scholars debating if some chapters are a blend of texts from the two locations.

Tafsir and Biblical Commentaries

Given that the Abrahamic traditions are all scripturally based, there should be no surprise that commentaries are common in the three faiths. Historically, theologians in each tradition believed that reading the text without proper instruction or context was dangerous. Commentaries were meant to inform theologians as well as lay readers of the texts. In Judaism, the early commentaries by Rabbis were called Midrash, which means to explain. These were meant to explain further the context of verses, but also offer insight of rabbinic discussions about ambiguities in the text. For Christians and Muslims, commentaries explain the context of the text but also engage in in-depth theological discussions. Like the Jewish texts, Islamic commentaries also used the term for explanation, which is *tafsir* in Arabic. The Tafsir on the left is written in Persian and talks about the religious obligations outlined in the Qur'an. The biblical commentary on the right is a copy of Nicholas Lyra's commentary, which is one of the oldest commentaries written in Latin.

Standalone Case: Feminist Critique

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have all had a long history of feminist scholarship and theology. One of the most famous documents for Christianity is the *Woman's Bible* edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton that ultimately points out that it is misogynistic readings of the Bible that are more of a problem than the Bible itself, but there are also problematic verses found in the Bible that should not be used in modern times. While Cady Stanton's book was more of a commentary, scholars of Islam like Laleh Bakhtiar are producing translations to show it is not simply interpretation but even translations that are affected by

misogyny. While Islamic Studies is a relatively new enterprise in the American Academy, there have been several works of feminist scholarship that continue to push the stereotypes that Islam is a religion of misogyny.

Iconoclasm and Calligraphy

In all three of the Abrahamic Faiths, adherents have struggled with the concept of iconoclasm. Can you have images and elaborate depictions of holy figures. In Christianity, there have been splits of denominations, because of iconoclasm. Within Protestant England, there were accusations that the wife of King Charles I, Henrietta, was violating the ideas of iconoclasm in her chapel, which was used as evidence for her Catholic faith. Ultimately, leading to her husband's execution. Some Bibles have images, but many Protestant Bibles do not. The Nuremburg Chronicle on the right is not a Bible, but a religious history of the world. In it contains almost 2000 woodcuts, which is a stark contrast to the Protestant Bibles and Islamic Qur'ans without images. While there are several artists, especially in Persia, who do create images of historic figures, the prophet's face is never depicted. Most Qur'ans and masjids (proper term for mosques) do not display any images, but instead there is a long history of calligraphy and using the important passages to form beautiful depictions of the names of God, such as the name of God on the pottery on the left. In some cases, important passages can be used to create zoomorphic calligraphy such as the bismillah (in the name of God) here:



Illuminated Manuscripts

Like calligraphy, one of the main ways the Qur'an is decorated is through illumination. The manuscripts were

often decorated with floral patterns that contained bright colors of gold, green, reds, and blues. Many of these colors were created through the use of metals and other elements like gold leaf, tin leaf, arsenic, and cobalt. While some earlier manuscripts existed, many of the Christian illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance resulted from the influence of Muslims living in southern Spain. Other manuscript styles and advances would also travel to Europe from Muslims such as marbling and the use of paper over animal skin. While the leaf of the Qur'an seen here on the left is newer than the Christian leaves, you can still see similar style and influence with the colors and floral patterns. The use of floral and geometric patterns is also a result of restricting the depiction of humans and iconoclasm.

Hagar and Ishmael/Hajar and Ismail

After Abraham and Sarah could not have a child, Sarah gave her handmaiden Hagar to her husband in order for them to have a child, Ishmael. Later, Sarah will have a child of her own named Isaac, causing her to cast Hagar and Ishmael out of their community. This story seems a bit confusing because according to biblical law, Ishmael is the oldest and rightful heir to Abraham's property. But this will start a long line of younger sons gaining the inheritance over the older brother. The Qur'an disputes this and has Ishmael as the proper inheritor of the covenant of Abraham. His mother is alluded to in the Qur'an but not named. She is revered as a symbol of motherhood, a status that Sarah sometimes gets in Judaism and Christianity. She is one of the only women, other than Mary, to speak to the angel Gabriel.

The Virgin Mary/Maryam, Mother of Isa

As said in the case, Mary is mentioned by name more in the Qur'an than in the Bible. Many of the mentions are tied to Jesus who is often described as Jesus, son of Mary. Some

scholars argue that this shows the rise of the traditions of Mary, while others see the Qur'an trying to clean-up ambiguities of the Bible. Surah Maryam begins much like Luke describing the birth narrative of John the Baptist. When it mentions the story of Mary, it emphasizes that Mary was a virgin and not touched by a man. The birth of Jesus is very different from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. After Jesus is born, he speaks from the cradle, which is a story also found in a non-canonical Christian text. Mary is considered the most honorable of all the women. The text on the left shows this passage that describes Mary's encounter with Gabriel and the subsequent birth of Jesus. The text on the right shows the similarities of the gospel of Luke and Surah Maryam.

Jesus Christ and Isa al-Masih

Outside of the prophet Muhammad, Jesus is the most important prophet in Islam. He is born a virgin, performs miracles, and is called messiah. However, Muslims believe in a very strict monotheism called *tawhid*, which is incompatible with the divinity of Jesus. Muslims argue that the theology that makes Jesus divine is a corruption related to Roman and Greek religion with their pantheons full demigods. This is one of the main reasons Jesus is not called the "son of God" in the Qur'an. Surah 17:111 specifies that God does not have a son nor a wife, specifically refuting the theology of Christianity. Although many of the other miracles of Jesus are acceptable within the Qur'an, the biggest miracle of the Gospels where Jesus is crucified and then resurrected, seen in the Bible on the right, is missing from the Qur'an. Surah 4:157 states that Jesus was not crucified but a likeness of him was. The Qur'an on the left shows this passage. Since Jesus is not dead in Islam, it is believed that he is still alive to this day. Some believe he was taken to heaven alive and remains there. There are stories in Islamic culture that describe people having encounters with

Jesus while he was still on earth, many years after he reportedly had died. Regardless, Christians and Muslims both believe that he will return at the end of times to fight of evil and usher the resurrected dead into Heaven.

The Infant Jesus

One of the great mysteries of Christianity is what happened in Jesus's formative years. In the Gospels, we are told of his birth; one scene when he is teaching in the temple as an adolescent; and then the years leading up to his death. Popular culture and media have long theorized what happened in these years, which is exactly what early Christians did as well. There are several non-Canonical works that were either written during the time the canon was formed, and subsequently rejected, or after the formation of the canon. Some of these stories are elaborations of other miracles that Jesus performs later in his life, like increasing grain for a feast. Others are not so ideal, such as cursing people, much like the fig tree in Mark 11. Some of those are found in the text on the right, which is an edited volume of non-canonical works by famous biblical scholar, and Lawrence native, Bart Ehrman. The text dates from around the middle of the second century (100s CE) and describes a scene where Jesus forms birds out of the clay from the river Jordan. He then brings those birds to life. The other place where this story is mentioned is in the Qur'an. Not only does this show the transmission of these stories from the second century to the seventh, but also the importance of the life of Jesus to Muslims. The Qur'an on the left highlights this passage from Surah 5:110. This Qur'an is the second to ever be translated into English and was one of Quayle's original texts. It contains his notations, including highlights of most of the passages that mention Jesus. The Bishop was interested in the connections highlighted in this exhibit and marked many of them in his English edition of the Qur'an.

For Further Reading

Solomon and the Ant: The Qur'an in Conversation with the Bible. David Penchansky (2021)

The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Ali Quli Qarai (2018)

The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition. John Kaltner and Younus Mirza (2018)

The Qur'an: A Beginner's Guide. Farid Esack (2009)

No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and the Future of Islam. Reza Aslan. (2005)

Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World. Carl Ernest (2003)

"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. Asma Barlas (2002)

Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective. Amina Wadud (1999)

To Visit:

By appointment only. To arrange for a visit at another time or for a group tour, please call the number below.

You may want to consider visiting other sites in Baldwin City such as the Osborne Chapel, the Holt-Russell Gallery, the Old Castle Museum, or the Lumberyard Arts Center.

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