

## The Gentle Answer: Introduction Summary

“Say: ‘Bring the Torah and read it if you are truthful.’” – Q3:93

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” – 1 Peter 3:15-16

### Removing Obstacles, Embracing Opportunities

*The Gentle Answer* is a much needed invitation to Muslims and non-Muslims to read each other’s scriptures together. It is tragic that for many centuries, Muslims and non-Muslims have refused or neglected to read each other’s scriptures. Why is this? This refusal or neglect is often based on deep-seated prejudices or feelings of political animosity. In some cases, people even believe they are forbidden to read the scriptures of the other. Others may refuse to read the scripture of the other out of fear.<sup>p.1</sup>

Why have Muslims and non-Muslims refused or neglected to read each other’s scriptures? Why have you?

Present world events often set Muslims and non-Muslims against each other.<sup>p.5</sup> A history of significant disagreements between Muslims and non-Muslims have also spread hostility and suspicion. But there is a better way. There are many Christians who want to live together in peace with Muslims. But the peace they seek is not in the Islamic “peace”<sup>1</sup> that requires non-Muslims to submit to *dhimmi* status<sup>2</sup>, nor the Western postmodern “peace” that will not talk about crucial differences.<sup>3</sup> As long as some Muslims forbid others, and Muslims therefore do not take the freedom to study the Bible, many unnecessary misunderstandings will remain.<sup>p.6</sup>

*The Gentle Answer* is an invitation to a better kind and way of peace nurtured through friendly personal contact and meaningful conversation about things that matter deeply to us. We want to listen carefully to one another to seek to understand one another and feel free to confess to one another our deepest beliefs.<sup>4</sup> This includes caring enough about each other to face our differences and to name what we see as false in the faith of a friend. Acknowledging differences shows respect to the identity and individuality of our conversation partner, not hostility.<sup>p.5</sup>

The intention of this book is to remove the anger from the disagreement, and instead to invite Muslims and non-Muslims to read and reason together. Our invitation respects the

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<sup>1</sup> It is crucial to clarify the nature of the “peace” that Islam offers and the mission of “peace” Muslims are engaged in. Islam is committed to a merger of personal and political since in Islam the faith community and the political system should be governed by the same authority. Muhammad is the model for this merger of the two. (cf. David Shenk in *Global Gods*, pp. 302-305)

<sup>2</sup> *Dhimmi* is the status given to Jews, Christians, and other minority communities in a Muslim state.<sup>p.479</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In an article in *Christianity Today*, Ed Stetzer defends proselytism in a multi-faith world, arguing that religions and individuals need not pursue the same goals in order to coexist peacefully. Stetzer first distinguishes between multi-faith **interaction** and inter-faith **partnership**—cooperation centered around common beliefs. He recognizes that because different faiths have contrasting goals and often a mutual desire to proselytize one another, inter-faith cooperation is often not possible. So that these religions may live side-by-side, he argues that we must let religions speak for themselves; speak with and about individual beliefs and actions, not faiths; grant individuals the freedom to make his or her own faith decisions; and respect other religions' sincere beliefs. Part of respecting these beliefs, Stetzer concludes, is allowing for proselytization. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/april/proselytizingmultifaith.html> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/april/proselytizingmultifaith.html?share=>

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Nickel, *Peaceable Witness Among Muslims*, p. 67.

ability of each reader or listener to reason freely without compulsion of any kind. The apostle Paul described beautifully the reasonable conversation we need: “by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every person’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Such a conversation rules out “secret and shameful ways,” wrote Paul, as well as deception or any kind of distortion of the Word of God.

We want to ask our Muslim friends to put aside centuries of prejudice against the Bible and to actually read the Bible. We will do the same—we will read the Qur’an without prejudice, attentively and carefully. We offer this gentle answer not only to refute false and damaging accusations against the Bible, but also to bring a blessing to the reader, to give the reason for the hope that we have.

### **The Qur’an and the early writings of Islam – what they say about the Bible**

The greatest hindrance to open and friendly conversation between Muslims and non-Muslims about their scriptures is the way in which some Muslims forbid other Muslims to read the Bible.<sup>p.6</sup> An influential Muslim book which has done a great deal of damage to reading and reasoning between Muslims and non-Muslims, is the *Izhār al-ḥaqq* (“Demonstration of truth”). Rahmat Allah Kairanwi published this book in 1864 in Arabic, but the book continues to be published in Arabic (1998) and is widely distributed throughout India in the Urdu translation *Bā’ibal se Qur’ān tak*.

Rather than an invitation to read and discuss one another’s scriptures, Kairanwi’s book was an angry attack claiming the authentic Torah and Gospel had disappeared because Jews and Christians had falsified the original text. The accusation of the corruption or deliberate falsification of the Bible is popular and influential among many Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Muslim polemicists especially like to make this accusation.

But there are many problems with this accusation.

One of the main problems is that the Qur’an, the scripture of Muslims and a major source of their authority, makes no such accusation! In fact, as many scholars have observed, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the Qur’an speaks of the earlier scriptures only in the most positive and respectful way.<sup>p.19</sup>

The Qur’an contains much material related to earlier scriptures. Sometimes these scriptures are identified by name; other times they are identified by the prophet to whom they are believed to have been revealed. In still other cases, earlier scriptures seem to be indicated by terms that are less clear and therefore understood by Muslim interpreters in various ways.

“We gave Moses the Book and the Deliverance, so that you might be rightly guided.” (Q 2:53)  
“Allah sent down the Torah [*Taurat* of the Prophet Moses] and the Gospel [*Injil* of Jesus the Messiah] before this as guidance for the people.” (Q 3:3)

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Abdu Murray shares how “From a young age, I was told that although Christians may mean well and may even sincerely follow their faith, their faith is fatally flawed. Their sacred texts were once the unadulterated word of God, but they fell into hopeless corruption....The Quran was revealed to Muhammad...to undo the harm caused by the biblical corruption and blasphemous teachings of Christianity.” See [“Growing Up Muslim in America”](#) in Nabeel Qureshi’s book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (bonus content), p. 299.