# "To Collect Information, Not to Deduce Law": Al-Biqāʿī's (d. 1480) Argument for Interpreting the Quran with the Bible

## Annas Rolli Muchlisin
Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar
anmu48227@hbku.edu.qa

## Abstract

This paper investigates how premodern Muslim intellectuals understood and utilized Biblical materials in their written works. While some studies have highlighted Muslim use of the Bible for polemical and apologetic purposes, this study shows that medieval Muslim interaction with Biblical passages was not confined to those two approaches, illustrating the complexity of their engagement with the Bible. Taking the fifteenth-century Mamluk Quran commentator Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 1480) as a case study, this paper discusses how al-Biqāʿī sought to quote relevant Biblical passages to offer a more comprehensive narrative of figures and events mentioned only briefly in the Quran. Criticized by his contemporaries, al-Biqāʿī wrote his Apologia to defend his approaches. Analyzing al-Biqāʿī's Apologia reveals the central argument that, for him, interpreting the Quran with the Bible is permissible for narrative and admonitory purposes but not for determining articles of faith and Islamic laws. In the end, he underscores the significant difference between *taḥrīf* (falsification) and *naskh* (abrogation), which should be appropriately understood in dealing with pre-Islamic revelation. Although he implied that certain Biblical passages were safe from textual falsification based on their conformity with the Quran, he supported the concept of abrogation, a widespread idea in medieval times across various religious traditions.

**Keywords:** Al-Biqāʿī, Apologia, the Bible, Muslim Literature

## Biblical Materials in Muslim Literature[1]

Many studies have shown that medieval Muslim intellectuals incorporated Biblical passages into their works for two main reasons: (i) to refute certain doctrines and practices in Christianity and Judaism and (ii) to claim that earlier revelations foretold the prophethood of Muḥammad (Adang, 2019; Reynolds, 2010). In other words, premodern Muslim scholars employed verses from the Torah and the Gospel for polemical and apologetic purposes. The former found its way through the genre of *al-radd* (refutation) works, while the latter was elaborated in *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* (the signs of Muḥammad's prophecy) epistles. One can list the following texts as belonging to the first category: al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 869) *al-Mukhtār fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*, Ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghrībī's (d. 1175) *Ghāyat al-maqṣūd fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā wa al-yahūd,* al-Qurṭubī's (d. 1273) *al-Iʿlām bimā fī dīn al-naṣārā min al-fasād wa al-awhām*, Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ,* Ibn al-Qayyim's (d. 1350) *Hidāya al-ḥayārāʾ fī ajwiba al-yahūd wa al-naṣārā*, and *al-Radd al-jamīl li ilāhiyyat ʿīsā bi sarīḥ al-injīl* attributed to al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Also, various refutations of Christian or Jewish beliefs and practices are often expounded in Muslim scholars' encyclopedic surveys of multiple religious traditions and sects, as exemplified in Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 1064) *al-Faṣl fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal.*

One of the central arguments that Muslim theologians frequently employed in their refutation of Judaism and Christianity was the claim that Jewish and Christian scriptures, although initially revealed by God, had been textually falsified (*taḥrīf*). To prove these scriptures had been distorted, Muslim polemicists pointed to specific Biblical passages where, according to them, it was theologically impossible they had originated from the Divine. One example was Genesis 19:30-36, where the Prophet Lot was said to have had sexual intercourse with his two daughters. For Ibn Ḥazm and other Muslim theologians, the messengers of God were protected from committing such major sins, which could undermine their prophetic missions (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32). The incorporation of this story into the Bible is seen as convincing proof that non-divine speech

---

[1] In this paper, the Bible refers to the Torah and the Gospel.

had contaminated the Bible. Although Muslim polemicists did not pioneer the *taḥrīf* argument, for accusations of textual falsification had been, as Lazarus-Yafeh notes, widespread in the world of Late Antiquity and commonly exploited in Jewish-Christian polemics (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32), Muslim *taḥrīf* arguments were grounded in several Quranic verses, such as al-Baqarah (2:75), al-Nisāʾ (4:46), al-Māʾidah (5:13 and 41). In one interpretation of 2:75, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) argues that because of *taḥrīf,* previous revelations have been contaminated with errors and falsehood, saying, "they (Jews), in their Torah, have changed permissible into impermissible, impermissible into permissible, truth into untruth, and untruth into truth" (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, p. 141). Based on these Quranic verses, their interpretations, and the alleged problematic narratives found in the Bible, Muslim polemicists were convinced that Jews and Christians had corrupted their scriptures.

However, one crucial issue emerged: had the Torah and the Gospel been distorted entirely or only partly? The Mamluk scholar Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 1480) informs us that premodern Muslim scholars were divided into four camps concerning the issue: (i) the first group believed the Bible had been corrupted completely, (ii) a second group argued most Biblical passages were forged, (iii) a third group maintained that falsification only occurred in a small number of Biblical passages, while (iv) a fourth group suggested the Bible had been distorted in its meaning (*taḥrīf al-maʿnā*) but not its text (*dūna taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 165–167). Most, if not all, Muslim authors of *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* epistles seem to adhere to the idea that textual falsification only occurred in some parts of Biblical passages. Once a Biblical verse corresponds to and supports a Quranic idea, the former is believed to be authentic. For instance, John 15:26, in which Jesus said, "When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me," is understood by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767) as predicting the coming of Muḥammad (Bertaina, 2017, p. 100). This Biblical verse is believed to align with the Quranic description of Muḥammad's message as *muṣaddiq* (confirmer) of previous revelations.

To give one more example, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), author of the famous *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwah,* points to al-Anbiyāʾ (21: 105),

which corresponds to Psalm 37:29, "the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever," as a divine prediction from earlier revelation not only of the prophecy of Muḥammad but also of the triumph of the Muslim community and their successful conquests (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32). The works that had been written on this genre include Abū Nuʿaym al-Aṣfahānī's (d. 1038) *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah,* al-Māwardī's (d. 1058) *Aʿlām al-nubuwwa,* and al-Bayhaqī's (d. 1066) *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah.* However, one should keep in mind that Muslim use of Biblical materials for polemics and apologetics are found not only in *al-radd* and *dalāʾil nubuwwah* genres but also in other works, such as ʿAlī Ibn Rabban's *Kitāb al-dīn wa al-dawlah* (Ibn Rabban, 1922).

Other studies demonstrate that Muslim engagement with the Bible is more complex, and their quotations of Biblical materials were not exclusively confined to polemical and apologetic purposes. McCoy III has recently classified Muslim use of Biblical data into three aims: (i) to refute Judeo-Christian scriptures, (ii) to argue for the legitimacy of Muḥammad's prophethood, and (iii) *ghayr dhālik*, that is, something other than the first two plans (McCoy III, 2022, p. xii). In what follows, we will highlight two approaches that fall under the rubric of *ghayr dhālik*. First, Biblical materials that were quoted to provide further detail about the shared history of human beings from the time of creation or about the tales of earlier prophets. While the former was typically illustrated in *Tarīkh* books, the latter can be seen in *qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* works. As noted by Adang, the early Muslim historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 898) takes his biblical history from the age of Adam and Eve through to the time of Jesus (Adang, 1996, p. 38). Whittingham observes how al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035), in his *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qaṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* narrated the tale of the Prophet Isaiah, who is mentioned in the Bible but not in the Quran (Whittingham, 2020, p. 113).

Second, *ascetic-pietistic* literature often incorporates many Biblical quotations as additional evidence to endorse particular virtues. As observed by Whittingham, early ascetic works, such as *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqāʾiq* by Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) and *Kitāb al-zuhd* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), made some use of Jesus as the model ascetic (Whittingham, 2020, p. 114). Tarif Khalidi demonstrates how this

renunciant literature consists of sayings and stories with a Gospel core. For instance, in Ibn al-Mubārak's work, Jesus is depicted as saying, "If he gives with the right hand, let him hide this from his left hand" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 53). This statement parallels Matthew 6:3, where Jesus says, "Your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 33). Furthermore, sayings attributed to Jesus are frequently quoted in classical Sufi texts, such as *Qūt al-qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996) and *Ḥilyāt al-Awliyāʾ* by Abū Nuʿaym al-Isfahānī (d. 1039). Khalidi underscores that by the time of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), whose *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* contains the most significant number of sayings attributed to Jesus in any Arabic Islamic text, Jesus was celebrated in Sufi circles as the Prophet of the heart *par excellence* (Khalidi, 2003, p. 44).

Nevertheless, one should be cautious about whether these Biblical quotations could be traced back to the written Gospels. Whittingham's analysis of 303 sayings attributed to Jesus, collected by Khalidi from the books of renunciation by Ibn al-Mubārak and ibn Ḥanbal, yields only 45 sayings with clear connections to the Bible (Whittingham, 2020, p. 115). This could be explained by the fact that Arabic translations of the Bible were not widely available in early Islamic history. Even modern researchers of Eastern Christianity have debated when the Bible was rendered into Arabic for the first time (Isteero, 1991, p. 218; Whittingham, 2020, pp. 9-10). Nevertheless, as some scholars maintain, Biblical stories were indeed transmitted orally, despite the absence of written texts. These sayings and stories, adds Khalidi, belong to "the common age-old fund of wisdom found in the rich traditions of Near Eastern cultures" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 4). In later Islamic history, the Arabic Bible was more visible and more widely available to the broader public. While the earliest Muslims used oral and limited written traditions of Biblical materials, the increasing availability of the Arabic Bible enabled later Muslim authors, such as al-Biqāʿī, to refer to the translated Biblical texts extensively.

Before we examine al-Biqāʿī's incorporation of Biblical passages into his Quran commentary and his defense, we must briefly look at how earlier Quran commentators dealt with Biblical narratives. Some major exegetes, such as al-Thaʿlabī, often consulted the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, the Jewish legends, to gain a more detailed understanding of earlier nations. The sources of

these *isrāʾīliyyāt* reports were Jewish and Christian converts, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām (d. 663) and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 655). In other words, they obtained these tales from oral transmissions. However, this does not negate the fact that some commentators consulted written Biblical texts as well, especially when Arabic translations of the Bible were more widely available. Casewit's study illustrates how the twelfth-century Andalusian exegete Ibn Barrajān (d. 1141) quoted the written Arabic Bible in his Quran commentary. Ibn Barrajān, Casewit holds, "seems to be the first Quranic exegete to seriously engage with the Bible non-polemically and through actual extended quotations" (Casewit, 2016, p. 2). As discussed by Casewit, Ibn Barrajān's purpose in quoting the Bible is to "fill gaps in his understanding of Biblical figures and narratives." One more critical point about Ibn Barrajān's engagement with the Bible is his approach to separating what he considers authentic Biblical verses from their allegedly corrupted passages by using the Quran as the standard for measurement. As the Quran claims to safeguard (*muhaymin*) earlier revelations, Biblical materials should be assessed solely based on their alignment with the Quran. Casewit calls this approach the 'Quranic hegemony' principle (Casewit, 2016, p. 3). As we will see later, al-Biqāʿī also grounds his Biblical engagement on this principle.

In modern scholarship on *tafsir* studies, Walid Saleh analyzed al-Biqāʿī's uses of Biblical passages to interpret the Quran in his *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa al-suwar.* He found that al-Biqāʿī had quoted the Bible from the very beginning of his *tafsīr* work, as exemplified by his quotation of the first three chapters of Genesis when interpreting Q. 2: 32-34 about the creation of Adam. Having provided his readers with many earlier Muslim interpretations of these verses, al-Biqāʿī proceeded to retell the creation narrative from the Hebrew Bible by saying, "And I saw in a translation of the Torah, and this is taken from its very beginning: 'God created the heavens and the earth, and it was darkness….'." He finished his extended quotation by stating, "This is the text from the Torah," but he neither rejected nor justified the Biblical story; he only re-narrated it (al-Biqāʿī, 1984, pp. 263–271; Saleh, 2008a, p. 673). This example shows that, like Ibn Barrajān, al-Biqāʿī cited Biblical passages to collect more information about human history.

As noted by Saleh, one characteristic of al-Biqāʿī's approach to the Bible was his excessive quoting; he almost quoted more than was necessary. For instance, when interpreting the Quranic verse 21:105, "And We have already written in the Psalms after the [previous] mention that the earth is inherited by My righteous servants," al-Biqāʿī not only cited its parallel Psalms verse but also quoted other verses: Psalms 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (verses 4-9 only), 13 (he cited the number as 12), 15 (-1), 17 (-1), 18 (-1), 22 (-1), 31 (-1), 34 (-1), 35 (-1), and 37 (-1). Saleh observes that al-Biqāʿī quoted Psalms even when there was no direct connection between the Quran and the psalm quoted (Saleh, 2007, p. 336). However, there were some occasions where the opposite took place. For instance, where the Quran provides a long, detailed narrative of the story of Joseph, al-Biqāʿī quoted only a few Biblical verses (Saleh, 2007, p. 338). Due to his extensive quotation of Biblical passages, al-Biqāʿī was criticized by many of the religious scholars of his time in Cairo, and his *tafsīr* work was blamed for no less than "glorifying the Torah and debasing the Quran" (*iẓhār al-tawrāt wa ikhfāʾ al-qurʾān*). It is in this milieu that al-Biqāʿī, to defend his hermeneutics, wrote his *Apologia* entitled *al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah*. The present article aims to closely examine al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* and finds that his central argument focuses on his accommodative view of the usability of the Bible to provide more narrative details of past events as well as to promote certain universal virtues. However, when it comes to articles of faith and law, the Bible, al-Biqāʿī asserts, should not be consulted to interpret the Quran.

### Defending the Use of the Bible: Al-Biqāʿī's *Apologia*

Al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* has been preserved in several manuscripts. Al-Azhar University Professor Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ (d. 2011) edited and published al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* based on two manuscripts housed at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya and the Islamic University of Medina (al-Sāyiḥ, 2010, p. 8). Two years prior, Walid Saleh, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto, edited al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* based on four manuscripts, two copies in Cairo and two copies in North Africa, which are now housed in Escorial. Saleh also informs us that there is proof that an *al-Aqwāl* manuscript was available in Yemen (Saleh, 2008b, p. 3). While the *al-Aqwāl* edited by al-Sāyiḥ was published in 2010 by Maktaba Jazīra

al-Ward in Cairo, the one edited by Saleh was published in 2008 by Brill in Leiden. This tells us that al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* has been made available to religious scholars in the Arab-Muslim world as well as among researchers in Western academia.

Al-Biqāʿī's *al-Aqwāl* comprises of an introduction, eight chapters, and concluding remarks. Al-Biqāʿī devoted his introduction to claiming that his critics, all of whom were members of the Shāfiʿī legal school in Egypt, were motivated by jealousy (*ḥasad*). Al-Biqāʿī argued that if his *tafsīr* contained heretical views, as his critics argued, religious scholars of other legal schools would also criticize his work, which was not the case. He also asked why a prominent Shāfiʿī jurist at Mecca did not take issue with his work if his critics were right. The Meccan jurist praised al-Biqāʿī's Quranic commentary instead. Furthermore, al-Biqāʿī argued that his critics were not equal rivals for him because they were not well known for their "religiosity, commanding right and forbidding wrong, virtue, and devotion" (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 59–60). His claim, however, could be challenged since his critics belonged to equally prominent scholarly circles, as represented by al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497), a leading figure of the professorial religious establishment (Saleh, 2008a, p. 631; Petry, 1981, pp. 8–10).

In the first chapter of his treatise, "On the testimonies of contemporary leading religious scholars concerning (al-Biqāʿī's) Quran commentary in the form of praise and fatwa," al-Biqāʿī collected 13 positive testimonies by Muslim scholars from the four Sunni legal schools to defend his Quranic commentary. The Shāfiʿī jurists whose testimonies he compiled included chief jurist (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Munāwī, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Shādī al-Hiṣanī, Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Bāʿūnī, the Shāfiʿī jurist of Mecca Ibrāhīm ibn Ẓahīra al-Makhzūmī, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Jawjarī. From the Hanafi school were chief jurist Muḥammad ibn al-Shaḥna al-Ḥalabī, the prominent Ḥanafī scholar Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kāfiyajī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Shamanī, Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Aqṣarāʾī, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Shaykh Yaḥyā. Al-Biqāʿī also managed to obtain positive testimonies from both the Mālikī chief jurist Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn al-Shaykh al-Ṭahṭāwī and the Ḥanbalī chief

jurist Aḥmad ibn Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Kanānī (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 63–86). This list of scholars illustrated al-Biqāʿī's vast intellectual network across Islamic legal schools.

Among these leading jurists, Ḥanafī scholar al-Kāfiyajī offered a more extended justification for al-Biqāʿī's engagement with the Bible. He argued that quoting sayings and stories that contained lessons and examples (al-ʿibrah wa al-ʿiẓah) were permissible according to the Sharīʿa, although the authenticity of such reports cannot be confirmed. From this principle, he went further by allowing the quoting of specific Biblical passages to drive deep reflection and admonition (al-iʿtibār wa al-ittiʿāẓ) but not to establish sound belief and legal decisions (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 71). Al-Kāfiyajī then narrated a prophetic tradition in which the Prophet was reported to say, "convey (my teachings) to the people even if it is a single sentence, and tell others the stories of Bani Israel, for it is not sinful to do so." The editor of al-Biqāʿī's epistle, al-Sāyiḥ, provided a footnote that this prophetic tradition could be found in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the most revered hadith collection in Sunni Islam. According to al-Kāfiyajī, hadith scholars understood that this tradition allowed [Muslims] to recount the stories of the Israelites, for the stories of earlier nations might contain lessons and admonition for the believers. The Quranic verse 12: 111, he continues, states, "there was certainly in their stories a lesson for those who understand." According to al-Kāfiyajī, what is prohibited is quoting Biblical passages other than the stories of earlier nations (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 72).

Al-Biqāʿī's opponents, however, referred to another prophetic tradition, which described the Prophet's anger at ʿUmar when the latter held passages of the Torah in his hands. The Prophet is reported to have exclaimed that if Moses were still alive, he would follow Muḥammad's laws. A Shāfiʿī defender of al-Biqāʿī, al-Bāʿūnī considered that this hadith was weak, and even if it was authentic, the Prophet's disapproval was not intended as taḥrīm but only tanzīh; to prevent Islamic teachings from being contaminated by pre-Islamic laws. Like al-Kāfiyajī, he concluded that what was prohibited was quoting Biblical materials to formulate laws, while recounting their stories was permissible (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 80).

In chapter two, entitled "The Ruling on quoting earlier scriptures to support Islam and to invalidate the doctrines of misguided people," al-Biqāʿī argued that making references to the Bible to support the truthfulness of Islam (ṣiḥḥat dīn al-Islām) and to refute Judaism and Christianity was an exalted tradition (sunnah jalīlah), which God commanded in Q. 3:93. It was also narrated that when a group of Jews came to the Prophet to report fornication committed by a Jewish couple, the Prophet asked them to consult the Torah, which showed that the punishment decreed by their scripture was stoning. This prophetic practice was, al-Biqāʿī stated, followed by his Companions, Successors, and subsequent generations of religious scholars up to his day because they believed it was a Prophetic tradition (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 90).

While al-Biqāʿī invoked the story of the Prophet and his Jewish questioners briefly in chapter two, he re-narrated the story in its more extended version in chapter three, "On the proofs that the quoting of the earlier scriptures for that purpose is an exalted tradition and correct approach." He demonstrated that these reports were found in the Sunni Muslim community's most revered hadith collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwud, al-Nasāʾi, and Ibn Mājah. Al-Biqāʿī also recounts that the Prophet said, "Tell others the stories of the Israelites, for it is not sinful to do so," a tradition that al-Kāfiyajī previously invoked in his defense of the quoting of Biblical materials (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 97). He titled chapter four "On the evidence to support it [the quoting of the Bible] and the proofs that this practice pleased the Prophet." This chapter consisted of several reports illustrating the Prophet's happiness with the conformity between his revelation and earlier messages. For instance, in a report recorded in Muslim's hadith collection, the Prophet sat on his pulpit, laughed, and then said to his companions, "Do you know why I brought you together?" The companions answered, "God and His Messenger know best." The Prophet explained, "By God, I did not gather you out of desire or fear but brought you [to tell this]: Tamīm al-Dārī was a Christian, but he came [to me], pledged alliance, and converted to Islam. He told me a story about Jesus that agrees with what I told you about him" (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 103-104).

In chapter five, "On the religious scholars' statements concerning the pieces of evidence," al-Biqāʿī collected opinions of earlier scholars about transmitting Biblical materials. As al-Biqāʿī noted, Shams al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, a commentator of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* explained that the basic principle a Muslim should uphold concerning Biblical materials was to postpone judgment (*tawāquf*); neither accepting nor rejecting them. This principle is grounded on the prophetic saying, "Do not believe the People of the Book, nor disbelieve them" (*lā tuṣaddiqū ahl al-kitāb wa lā tukadhdhibūhum*). Al-Kirmānī underscored the fact that Muslims were commanded to believe in pre-Quranic scriptures revealed to the earlier prophets, but at the same time, Muslims do not know which parts of these scriptures had been falsified, so the best solution was *tawāquf*. Al-Biqāʿī accepted this explanation but noted that this principle applies only to those Biblical materials whose authenticity could not be determined. However, if the validity or the falsification of those Biblical materials could be measured by their conformity or non-conformity with the Quran, the *tawāquf* principle should not be applied (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 109). As we have seen before, Ibn Barrajān preceded al-Biqāʿī in elucidating this idea of, as Casewit puts it, "the Quranic hegemony" (Casewit, 2016, p. 3).

In chapter six, "About several religious scholars who cited the earlier scriptures," al-Biqāʿī mentioned several Muslim intellectuals who referenced Biblical information. One of them was the companion ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar. It was reported that Ibn ʿUmar was asked about the Prophet's attributes and answered, "By God, the Prophet was characterized in the Torah by the same attributes found in the Quran" (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 125). He went on to mention other Muslim scholars who also cited Biblical materials, included Companions of the Prophet such as Salmān al-Fārisī and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and later Muslim intellectuals, such as al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, Nūr al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, al-Bayḥaqī, al-Dārimī, Ibn Ẓafar, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Ibn Ṣalāḥ, al-Baghawī, Maḥmūd al-Aṣbahānī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, and others (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 123–162). As discussed above, Muslim scholars before al-Biqāʿī did cite from the Bible, but primarily for polemical or apologetic purposes, such as al-Bayḥaqī and al-Qarāfī, as mentioned by al-Biqāʿī above. However, it is worth remembering that some Muslim scholars quoted Biblical stories for admonition, such as Ibn Ṣalāḥ. In his collection of *fatāwā*, for instance, Ibn

Ṣalāḥ opted to cite a statement attributed to the Torah, saying, "It was reported that in the Torah: O son of Adam, whenever you sleep, you die. And whenever you wake up, you are resurrected" (Ibn Ṣalāḥ, 1987, p. 140). Nevertheless, unlike his predecessors, al-Biqāʿī' quoted Biblical passages more extensively.

Al-Biqāʿī devoted chapter seven to addressing the core of the debate and controversy surrounding his quotation of the Bible, namely the issue of falsification (*taḥrīf*). Had the Bible been textually falsified, as Muslims believe, there would be no need to quote its passages because they were inauthentic. To engage with the issue, al-Biqāʿī wrote that, based on Ibn al-Mulqan's survey, Muslim scholars disagreed on how much the Bible had been corrupted. The first group believed the Bible had been distorted completely. For al-Biqāʿī, this was an extreme idea (*wa huwa ifrāṭ*). The second group argued that most Biblical passages were forged. The third group maintained that falsification only occurred in a small number of Biblical passages. A fourth group suggested the Bible had been distorted in its meaning (*taḥrīf al-maʿnā*) but not its text (*dūna taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*). Some studies suggest that Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) supported the *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* idea, based on his remark, "*The statement concerning the alteration of the Torah by the Jews is unacceptable to thorough scholars and cannot be understood in its plain meaning, since custom prevents people who have a revealed religion from dealing with their divine scriptures in such a manner*" (Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, p. 62). Al-Biqāʿī highlighted that the group who supported the *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* idea often referred to the Quran 6: 34, "And none can alter the words of Allah" (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 167).

Al-Biqāʿī did not subscribe to the first and the fourth groups since he believed some parts of the Bible were authentic while others were inauthentic based on their compatibility and incompatibility with the Quran. Next, al-Biqāʿī reproduced arguments made earlier by other scholars whose testimonies he collected in the first chapter of his *Apologia*, such as the idea that the Prophet's dislike toward ʿUmar's holding of pages of the Torah meant *tanzīh*, not *taḥrīm*. To this, he adds his argument that the prohibition on reading and citing the Bible applied only to lay Muslims but not to the scholarly class, especially when the

situation required them, such as during polemics, to argue in support of Islam and against other religions (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 173). We see from this line of argument that al-Biqāʿī grounded his understanding of the issue in the medieval hierarchy of ʿām-khāṣṣ (the lay people and the elites).

From these chapters, al-Biqāʿī's argument can be summarized as follows: the validity and invalidity of Biblical materials are to be assessed through their compatibility and incompatibility with Quranic verses. If they align with the Quran, they are authentic and thus can be accepted and be used to interpret the Quran. However, if they do not, they should be refuted. In the last chapter, al-Biqāʿī illustrated a situation when compatibility or incompatibility with the Quran could not be established. What should be done in such circumstances? Al-Biqāʿī employed an analogy that since Islamic scholarly tradition often used weak hadith for admonitory purposes, Biblical narratives could also be used in this manner. Since weak hadith cannot be used to formulate articles of faith (ʿaqīdah) and laws (aḥkām), Biblical materials also could not be consulted in such matters. Al-Biqāʿī equated Biblical materials whose authenticity could not be proved through the Quran with weak hadith; both are accepted for admonitory purposes only but not for producing legal decisions and establishing sound belief. Al-Biqāʿī maintained that the purpose of citing the Bible was not to rely on it but to gather more information only (li-anna al-maqṣūd al-istiʾnās lā al-iʿtimād) (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 179-182).

Although al-Biqāʿī considered certain parts of the Bible authentic, he believed that the coming of the Quran as the final revelation superseded earlier divine scriptures. In his conclusion, al-Biqāʿī contended that the status of Biblical passages authenticated through their alignment with the Quran was equal to that of abrogated Quranic verses (mansūkh). They were divine and thus should be respected; e.g., somebody with no ritual purity was prohibited from holding them, but their laws were no longer applicable (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 186). Like the abrogated parts of the Quran, the Bible could be quoted only to provide more information or for admonitory purposes, but not to deduce Islamic beliefs and laws.

### Conclusion

Al-Biqāʿī's case, as examined in this paper, illustrates that medieval Muslim interaction with the Bible was more complex than widely assumed. While we cannot deny that many premodern Muslim theologians engaged with Biblical materials for polemical and apologetic purposes, we equally cannot dismiss that some Muslim scholars used the Bible non-polemically. Several Muslim intellectuals cited certain Biblical narratives to fill the gaps in their knowledge of previous prophets and their peoples, which might contain valuable lessons and admonitions for Muslims, as Quran 12: 111 asserts. Although quoting Biblical passages for narrative purposes was permitted by al-Biqāʿī and several other Muslim scholars, the classical Muslim intelligentsia surveyed in this study agreed that referring to them to determine articles of faith and Islamic law (*ḥukm*) was not acceptable.

This paper also shows medieval Muslims' attempts to examine the authenticity and inauthenticity of Biblical passages through their alignment with data in the Quran. For al-Biqāʿī, the idea that the whole Bible had been falsified, which had been championed by some Muslims, was an extreme position. He maintained that certain parts of the Bible were still authentic based on their compatibility with Islamic scripture. Despite their authenticity, al-Biqāʿī believed the coming of the Quran superseded the Bible. This conviction that one's religion supersedes other religions was not unique to al-Biqāʿī or even Muslim theologians more broadly, for it was shared by other religious communities. It was part of what von Grunebaum referred to as "the mood of (medieval) times," when "each civilization was convinced of its spiritual superiority, of possessing the unadulterated truth...." (Friedmann, 2003, p. 34).

## References

Adang, C. (1996). *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*. Brill.

———. (2019). Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures. In C. Adang & S. Schmidtke (Eds.), *Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible Texts and Studies* (pp. 15–38). Lockwood Press.

Al-Aṣfahānī, Abū Nuʿaym. (1986). *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah.* Dār al-Nafāʾis.

Al-Bayhaqī. (1988). *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah.* Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.

Al-Biqāʿī, Burhān al-Dīn. (1984). *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Vol. 1). Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī.

———. (2010). *Al-Aqwāl al-qawimah fi ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadimah* (Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ, Ed.). Maktaba Jazīra al-Ward.

Al-Ghazālī. (2016). *Al-Radd al-jamīl A Fitting Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus Attributed to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali.* (Mark Beaumont and Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, eds.). Brill.

Al-Jāḥiẓ. (1991). *al-Mukhtār fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*. Maktaba al-Zahrā'.

Al-Maghrībī, Ibn Yaḥyā. (2006). *Ghāya al-maqṣūd fī al-radd ʿalā al-naṣārā wa al-yahūd.* Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabiyyah.

Al-Māwardī. (1986). *Aʿlām al-nubuwwah.* Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.

Al-Qurṭubī. (1980). *al-Iʿlām bimā fī dīn al-naṣārā min al-fasād wa al-awhām*. Dār al-Turāth al-ʿArabī

Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr. (2001). *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl ay al-Qurʾān*. Hajar Markāz al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyyah wa al-Islāmiyyah.

Bertaina, D. (2017). Early Muslim attitudes towards the Bible. In D. Thomas (Ed.), *Routledge handbook on Christian-Muslim relations* (pp. 98–106). Routledge.

Casewit, Y. (2016). A Muslim Scholar of the Bible: Prooftexts from Genesis and Matthew in the Qur'an Commentary of Ibn Barrajān of Seville (d. 536/1141). *Journal of Qur'anic Studies, 18*(1), 1–44.

Friedmann, Y. (2003). *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition.* Cambridge University Press.

Ibn al-Qayyim. (2008). *Hidāya al-ḥayārāʾ fī ajwiba al-yahūd wa al-naṣārā.* Majmaʿ al-Fiqh al-Islāmī.

Ibn Ḥazm. (1924). *al-Faṣl fī al-milal wa al-aḥwāʾ wa al-niḥal.* Maktaba al-Salām al-ʿĀlamiyyah.

Ibn Khaldūn. (2015). *The Muqaddimah An Introduction to History* (Franz Rosenthal, Trans.). Princeton University Press.

Ibn Rabban, 'Alī. (1922). *The Book of Religion and Empire* (A. Mingana, Trans.). Manchester University Press.

Ibn Ṣalāḥ. (1987). *Fatāwā wa masā'il Ibn Ṣalāḥ fī al-tafsīr wa al-ḥadīš wa al-uṣūl* (ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Āmīn Qalʿajī, Ed.). Dār al-Maʿrifah.

Ibn Taymiyya. (1999). *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ.* Dār al-ʿĀṣima.

Isteero, A. (1991). *ʿAbdullāh Muslim Ibn Qutayba's Biblical Quotations and Their Source: An Inquiry into the Earliest Existing Arabic Bible Translations* [Ph.D. thesis]. Johns Hopkins University.

Khalidi, T. (Ed.). (2003). *The Muslim Jesus Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature.* Harvard University Press.

Lazarus-Yafeh, H. (1992). *Intertwined worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible criticism.* Princeton University Press.

McCoy III, R. M. (2022). *Interpreting the Qurʾān with the Bible (Tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-l-Kitāb): Reading the Arabic Bible in the Tafsīrs of Ibn Barrağān and al-Biqāʿī.* Brill.

Petry, C. F. (1981). *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages.* Princeton University Press.

Reynolds, G. S. (2010). On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (tahrîf) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic. *Journal of the American Oriental Society, 130*(2), 189–202.

Saleh, W. A. (2007). 'Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness': The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqāʿī's Qurʾān Commentary. In Y. T. Langermann & J. Stern (Eds.), *Adaptations and innovations: Studies on the interaction between Jewish and Islamic thought and literature from the early Middle Ages to the late twentieth century, dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer* (pp. 331–347). Peeters.

———. (2008a). A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqāʿī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qurʾān. *Speculum, 3,* 629–654.

———. (2008b). *In Defense of the Bible: A critical edition and an introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible treatise.* Brill.

Whittingham, M. (2020). *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries.* De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110335880