265035 - What does it mean to say that the origin of the Gospel was sound? How can we be certain of the soundness of texts in the Gospel?

the question

What does it mean to say that the origin of the Gospel was sound? How can we be certain of the soundness of texts in the Gospel, when it is not known how they were transmitted in the first place?

Summary of answer

Allah sent down the Gospel to ‘Eesaa ibn Maryam (Jesus son of Mary – peace be upon him), but some distortions were introduced into it with the passage of time.
Therefore what we must do is measure what people have now of this text against proven shar‘i evidence, then whatever is known to be true on the basis of that evidence we believe in it, and whatever is known to be false on the basis of that evidence we disbelieve init. With regard to that for which we do not know of any evidence, we keep quiet about it and refer knowledge of that to the Lord of the Worlds.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The verses of the Holy Qur’an state that the original Gospel (Injeel) from Allah, may He be exalted, was sent down to His Messenger ‘Eesaa (peace be upon him).

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came

before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous”

[al-Maa’idah 5:46]

“Then We sent following their footsteps Our messengers and followed [them] with Jesus, the son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy and monasticism, which they innovated; We did not prescribe it for them except [that they did so] seeking the approval of Allah . But they did not observe it with due observance. So We gave the ones who believed among them their reward, but many of them are defiantly disobedient”

[al-Hadeed 57:27]

“He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:3].

Believing in this is one of the basic principles of our ‘aqeedah.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who have believed, believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Book that He sent down upon His Messenger and the Scripture which He sent down before. And whoever disbelieves in Allah , His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray”

[an-Nisaa’ 4:136]

“The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers.’ And they say, ‘We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination’”

[al-Baqarah 2:285].

Secondly:

Changes, alterations and distortions have occurred in the Gospel. This is something that is referred to in the Islamic texts, and is supported by research.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to the Gospel, we have noted above that what the Christians have now is four separate books, written by four different men: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So how can anyone deny that alterations and distortions have taken place?

End quote from Hidaayat al-Hayaaraa (p. 241).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to the Gospels that the Christians have, there are four Gospels: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are unanimously agreed that Luke and Mark never saw the Messiah; only Matthew and John saw him. [They are also unanimously agreed] that these four books that they call the Gospel may each on its own also be called a Gospel. In fact, these men wrote these books after the Messiah had been taken up to heaven, and they do not say that these books are the word of Allah or that the Messiah conveyed them from Allah; rather they narrated in them some of the words of the Messiah and some of his deeds and miracles.

They stated that they did not transmit everything that they had heard and seen from him, so they are more akin to what is narrated by the scholars of hadith, biography and maghaazi accounts of military campaigns) from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) of his words and deeds that are not Qur’an.

Hence what is narrated in the Gospels is of this type. If it is a command from the Messiah, then the command of the Messiah is the command of Allah, and whoever obeys the Messiah has obeyed Allah.

And whatever the Messiah said about matters of the unseen, Allah had informed him of it, for he is infallible and protected from lying in what he told people.

We may note that the books that they have which speak of the Prophets are akin to the books [of hadith] transmitted from Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him); they were not narrated by so many from so many that it is inconceivable that they could all have agreed upon a lie [i.e., tawaatur]; the word of the narrators who are not infallible is not regarded as proof; and they have no way of distinguishing between what of these reports is true and what is false, as the Muslims have.

Based on the above, these Gospels that the Christians have come under this heading. They contain a great deal of the words, deeds and miracles of the Messiah, and they contain things that are undoubtedly errors. Even if the one who initially wrote these reports was not someone who could be accused of deliberately lying, the report narrated by one or two or three or four is still vulnerable to errors and mistakes, especially when a person hears or sees something, then speaks of it many years later. Mistakes in such scenarios are common, and their nation at that time was not protected from error in the event of consensus upon a matter, so that if they all accepted something and agreed on it, it might be regarded as evidence. Moreover, the disciples (al-hawwaariyyoon) were only twelve men.

End quote from al-Jawaab as-Saheeh (3/21-27).

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 47516.

Thirdly:

Despite this distortion, there were some things in the texts that had not been distorted at the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), as is indicated by the texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The mutawaatir texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah indicate that the Torah and Gospel that existed at

the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) contained words that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, had sent down.

End quote from al-Jawaab as-Saheeh (2/449).

Among the texts which indicate that are the following:

“So if you are in doubt, [O Muhammad], about that which We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so never be among the doubters”

[Yoonus 10:94]

“Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So they who have believed in him, honored him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him - it is those who will be the successful”

[al-A‘raaf 7:157].

Fourthly:

From the above, it may be understood that there are some texts of the Gospel that we may be certain are distorted, because there is sound evidence to that effect. And there are some texts of the Gospel that it is not far-fetched to say that they are from Allah, but we leave knowledge of that to Him, may He be exalted, and we do not say anything definite concerning them; we neither believe them nor disbelieve in them.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic to the Muslims. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Do not believe the People of the Book and do not

disbelieve them; rather say: “We have believed in Allah and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [submitting] to Him’ [Aal ‘Imraan 3:84].”

It was narrated from Ibn Abi Namlah al-Ansaari, that his father said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whatever the people of the Book tell you, do not believe it and do not disbelieve it. Say: We believe in Allah and His Messengers. Then if it is false you will not have believed it and if it is true you will not have disbelieved it.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (3644); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah (6/712).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate”

[al-Hujuraat 49:6],

Includes information brought by anyone who is disobedient (or an evildoer), and even if he is a disbeliever it is not permissible to reject his news except on the basis of proof, just as it is not permissible to believe him except on the basis of proof.

In Saheeh al-Bukhaari it is narrated that Abu Hurayrah said: The People of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If the People of the Book tell you something, do not believe them and do not disbelieve them, for either they will tell you something true and you will disbelieve it or they will tell you something false and you will believe it. Rather say: ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him’ [al-‘Ankaboot 29:46].”

This is what is indicated by the Qur’an and Sunnah, that a person should refrain from taking a stand on that for which he does not know whether it is incorrect or correct.

End quote from al-Jawaab as-Saheeh (6/461-462)

Conclusion:

As the Torah and Gospel were originally from Allah, may He be exalted, then with regard to what they contain of things that are not soundly proven to be false, we cannot state definitively whether or not they are distorted except on the basis of evidence. If we cannot find any evidence, then we refer knowledge of that to Allah, may He be exalted.

And Allah knows best.