THE QUR’ĀNIC VIEW OF PREVIOUS REVELATIONS: A CONCEPTUAL WEB

by

BRYAN GALLANT

(Under the Direction of ALAN GODLAS)

ABSTRACT

In contrast to the common Muslim conception that asserts both a sharp disconnect between previous revelations and the Qur‘ān as well as that such revelations are corrupt in their present form, a thorough study of all of the verses in the Qur‘ān referencing any of the previous revelations (Torah, Psalms, Gospel) demonstrates the following: first, there is a coherent conceptual web describing a close interconnected relationship between the Qur‘ān and those previous revelations; second, the Qur‘ānic view of such revelations is one of praise, support and integration; and third, the web displays cycles of relationship and interdependence that suggest a working epistemology of all the revealed books, an epistemology that could have important implications for interfaith dialog.

INDEX WORDS: Qur‘ān, revelations, Torah, Psalms, Gospel, semantic field, tahrīf, corruption, epistemology, interfaith dialog, Tawrāt, Injīl, Zabūr, prophecy, confirmation, Bible, conceptual web, thematic study
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BRYAN GALLANT

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by

BRYAN GALLANT

Major Professor: Alan Godlas
Committee: Kenneth L. Honerkamp
William L. Power

Electronic Version Approved:
Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my precious Penny. Your love, support and friendship through our years of marriage have been remarkable and these last two during my studies are no exception. Thank you for joining me in this journey and making it a reality. Elijah, Hannah, and little Noah, thanks for letting Daddy stay late during those last few months to get this finished. I love you all, and could not have done it without your support.
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To my classmates, in this degree, Matt and Yunus, it was good to walk with you these last two years. May this experience only be the beginning of our lives in this field. Blessings!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the common Muslim conception that asserts both a sharp disconnect between previous revelations and the Qur’ān as well as that such revelations are corrupt in their present form, a thorough study of all of the verses in the Qur’ān referencing any of the previous revelations (the Tawrāt, Zabūr, Injīl or the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel respectively) demonstrates the following: first, there is a coherent conceptual web describing a close interconnected relationship between the Qur’ān and those previous revelations; second, the Qur’ānic view of such revelations is one of praise, support and integration; and third, the web displays cycles of relationship and interdependence that suggest a working epistemology of all the revealed books, an epistemology that could have important implications for interfaith dialog.

After a few more words regarding reason and scope of this study, chapter two establishes the methodological framework by examining the works of T. Izutsu, F. Rahman, and D. Madigan, and their thematic studies of the Qur’ān. Building on their work, chapter three both enunciates the exact process I used to establish the conceptual web of what the Qur’ān teaches about the previous revelations as well as describes the actual structure of the web with its integral parts and the words or ideas connected to it. Chapter four builds upon that structure and interaction of the layers of
the web to discuss some of the internal relationships between the revelations themselves as seen throughout the Qur’ānic verses when seen as a composite whole. Finally, chapter five applies the conclusions of this study to a few of the relevant fields of discourse and considers some of the implications of this research. I will also identify some suggestions for further research.

*Reasons for this Study*

In the current world in which we live, the role of interfaith dialog and cooperation is taking a more central role as we attempt to coalesce a peaceful relationship between peoples, countries, and religions. Religion and faith seem to be at the very core of many of our conflicts and deepest emotions. This means that there needs to be a more positive interaction between Jews, Christians, and Muslims than we have seen in the past – even though they all claim to worship the same God! Unfortunately, dialog like that is immediately hampered by truth claims, doctrinal challenges, historic scars, and even attacks on the very veracity of each other’s scriptures. All of these complicated realities minimize any tangible possibility for meaningful and positive interaction.¹

From the Qur’ānic perspective, God has sent His revelations (some of them named directly, others not) throughout time and to many different peoples. These

¹ Dr. Alan Godlas has shared (within his religiological construct) that there needs to be a common epistemology in order to really at any sort of truth decisions between two groups. A possible implication of this study would suggest that Muslims (following the teachings of the Qur’ān) should be prepared to meet both Jews and Christians with a common epistemology for discussion. Whether or not that becomes a reality remains to be seen on a large scale. Alan Godlas, “Religiology” and “Hermeneutical Understanding” (ongoing foundational principle of lectures), University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, August 2005, through May 2007.
messages, of which the Qur’ān is also one, have all proclaimed the same overall words and Divine message and are given to humanity for guidance and preparation for the day of judgment. If it can be shown that from the Qur’ānic point of view the revelations are all considered Divinely inspired and protected by God such that the forms in which we have them now still retain their essential salvific value), there would be the possibility of calling all of the People of the Book(s)\(^2\) to a quality of faith and lived out reality based on those revelations in order to live in peace and cooperation instead of animosity, betrayal, and war. Such is the grand hope that this study is undertaken with and written in such a way as to be just one voice towards creating such a possible outcome.

Before I begin, a few notes of process are in order. Even though this paper is written from the perspective that assumes and accepts the Muslim understanding of the Qur’ān and the role that the Prophet Muḥammad plays in revelatory history from a Qur’ānic worldview, the honorific phrases common to Islamic religious writing that follow the mention of God’s name\(^3\) and the phrases associated with Prophet Muḥammad and other prophets will not be used. This was not done out of any disrespect to anyone or even God Himself, but rather, was adopted to keep this discussion anchored in the academic arena as well as not to unnecessarily alienate any non-Muslim readers. This also means that some of the logic will only make sense for

\(^2\) This phrase is very common and in Arabic is: *ahl al-kitāb*. In this particular sentence, however, I am attempting to group all people of the revelations into one – which may be problematic for some.

\(^3\) Throughout this paper, the word God will be used synonymously for the Arabic name, Allah. Although this author sees no sustainable distinction between the use of God in English and Allah in Arabic (for both Muslims and Christians), it is recognized that some may have issue with that usage. Therefore, in an effort to minimize any confusion, within the frame of this study, please note that the terms are used interchangeably (theological concerns are not being dealt with here regarding the names used).
someone who has already accepted the role of the Qur’ān in their life (or at least can appreciate its affect on another).

Having said that, this thesis does not answer the issues of whether or not the Qur’ān is inspired or what role it is to play in the lives of the believers. I assume from the beginning that the reader already comes with those decisions in mind and reads accordingly. Whether or not this study will draw them deeper in their understanding and appreciation of the Qur’ān remains to be seen, but that is not part of the scope of this study.

In addition these pages will not endeavor to answer the issue as to whether or not the revelations named and dealt with within the Qur’ān (i.e., the Tawrāt, Zabūr, and Injīl) are the same revelations that we have today (i.e., the Jewish Tanakh, or the Bible, whether Protestant or Catholic). That is outside the scope of this particular research as well. However, some of the conclusions from this study will shed light on a few serious principles with which to consider those issues within the grand scheme of the Qur’ānic teachings regarding those revelations.

Wherever possible, as needed, dates will be given in the following format: (Hijrī / Gregorian). Qur’ānic references will copied from the computer program, Qur’ān Viewer Software by Jamal Al-Nasar⁴ and will include the Arabic text and English taken from Yusuf Ali’s translation of the meanings of the Qur’ān.⁵

⁴ DivineIslam’s Qur’ān Viewer software v2.913.
Framework for Research

Realizing that any attempt to define what a religious text says is in one sense ludicrous and in another biased, I will begin this study by describing my own perspective and prescribing the boundaries of interaction with the text of the Qur’ān. In order to do an academic study of this nature one needs to be aware of one’s own views and be willing to adopt an appropriate framework for research. Realistically, the days of believing academic research to be completely objective have passed. Therefore, in defining my parameters, I am acknowledging my initial framework of study.

Farid Esack creates a useful illustration to help “picture” one’s relationship with the Qur’ān (I would extend the metaphor to any religious text as well). This metaphor is based upon the idea of a love relationship between the person and the text as one lover to another. Similarly, Cragg described the Qur’ān as being “like a veiled bride whose hidden face is only known in the intimacy of truth’s consummation.” Esack identifies six potential views that can be expressed both verbally as well as with a handy diagram that he supplies to the reader to supplement his explanation. Obviously, he has arbitrarily determined the labels and their definitions, and even the very romantic overtones of the whole endeavor; but they are coherent and helpful for envisioning the direction from which I approach the subject.

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6 Dr. Alan Godlas has shown the importance of one understanding their own worldview in a coherent way before attempting to interact deeply with another. His religiological hermeneutic process helps to create a logical and coherent process to understand one’s own views and then to objectively interact with another’s views in order to have the best chance of understanding each other. It is based upon establishing a religiological grid described within six broad categories (epistemology, ontology, psychology, anthropology, teleology, and methodology) to define one’s religious understanding. Alan Godlas, “Religiology” (ongoing foundational principle of lectures), University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, August 2005, through May, 2007.


8 Kenneth Cragg, Readings in the Qur’ān (San Francisco: Collins, 1988), 14.

Within this schema, three of the relationships with the Qur‘ān are for members of Islam or the ummah, whereas the other three can be applied to non-Muslims. The Muslim relationships are described as: Ordinary Muslims/Uncritical Lovers; Confessional Muslim Scholars/Scholarly Lovers; and finally, Critical Muslim Scholars/Critical Lovers. Following that is the set of three for those outside of Islam: Participant Observers/Friends of the Lover; Revisionists (‘disinterested observers’)/the Voyeurs; and lastly, Polemicists/Polemicists. Esack goes on to use those constructs to categorize various voices within the academic study of the Qur‘ān depending on where he views they fit in. Obviously, there may be challenges to this sort of descriptive (though not evaluative, he claims) segregation of academic writers. But, I will not be too long diverted dealing with that issue.

One does need, however, to recognize that this endeavor to “label” the direction of one’s study goes back to a long argued issue of whether or not the study of the Qur‘ān (or any religious text) is limited only to the conscientious believers of that text. Recent scholars have wrestled with that very issue for years and only recently has the following view been written in the context of modern Islamic research:

Scholarship on the Qur‘ān in Western universities has recently adopted contemporary schools of literary theory and criticism, and hermeneutical theories. Such approaches demonstrate that the meaning of a text cannot be taken for granted but depends on diverse textual, contextual and inter-textual factors, in addition to the circumstances of textual receptors in creating horizons of meaning. The contribution of

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10 Others believe this sort of distinction is no longer relevant. A quote to that point will follow this section of his views.
11 Ibid., 2-10.
12 Suffice it to say that we will not dive into all of those issues, but if one had the interest the following sources do offer a detailed synopsis of the discussion. Richard C. Martin, ed., Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 243. David Marshall, God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur’ānic Study (Surrey, Eng.: Curzon, 1999), 220.
Muslim academics to the contemporary field is such that it is now commonly argued that the notion of a ‘divide’ between ‘Muslim’ and ‘non-Muslim’ or ‘Western’ scholarship on the Qur’ān is increasingly irrelevant.\(^\text{13}\)

Keeping this in mind, that possibly the very notion of determining whether or not a researcher is Muslim or not may be less relevant today, the value of Esack’s descriptions is that they at least provide a vehicle or a framework for identifying one’s own perspective from the start and owning up to any particular biases.

As I have already mentioned in the previous section, this actual study will be undertaken within the framework of a Qur’ānic worldview, and therefore I am writing as a submitted believer in the One True God, whom Prophet Muḥammad served. Though I am not one to be easily contained by Esack’s formulas (or anyone else’s for that matter), I would most clearly describe myself as someone bridging the two worlds of the Critical Lover and Friend of the Lover being comfortable in both, yet not acquiescing to any one label due to the imperfect realities within all labels and human constructed groups. In addition to that sort of relationship, I bring a solid Biblical foundation to the study of the Qur’ān and read each in light of the other (as I will show is encouraged within the epistemological worldview of the Qur’ān). Therefore, I actually choose to extend Esack’s diagram to include the relationship with all of the revealed messages of God and point the relationship beyond the “books”\(^\text{14}\) themselves.

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\(^\text{14}\) The quotes here are used in response to Madigan’s excellent work in reshaping the view of Book in regards to the Qur’ān. See Daniel A. Madigan, The Qur’ān’s Self Image : Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture (Princeton, New Jersey; Woodstock, Oxfordshire X20 ISY: Princeton University Press, 2001), 236.
to the Author of them. Therein lies my greatest desire and accepted label: I desire Him in whom all Truth dwells!

Therefore, in the context of that “label” and with a presupposition to accept the revelatory claims that the Qurʾān expresses in a variety of ways throughout its pages, I move on to the actual goal of letting the Qurʾān “speak” for itself as best as possible.
CHAPTER 2
FOUNDATIONAL METHODOLOGY

Of course the field of Qur’ānic studies is by no means new to either Muslims or non-Muslims, and spans many centuries of scholarly interaction with the text. However when one turns to thematic studies in English the field is relatively new\(^\text{15}\) and representatively small.\(^\text{16}\) Within that fairly limited field of the last century one name and one particular methodology rises above and acts as the foundation for following works. The name is Toshihiko Izutsu and his methodological framework is called the semantic field.\(^\text{17}\)

In this chapter I will establish the principles of Izutsu’s method for a thematic study of the Qur’ān and then take time to consider the additional reasons for Fazlur Rahman and Daniel Madigan’s studies. Each of these authors represent a variation of


\(^{17}\) The focus of describing Izutsu’s work will be to identify the process and explain its usefulness to our study at hand, not to express all the intricacies and reasons for the semantic field as they relate to other linguistic studies. If someone wants to read more of that history, Madigan offers some of that history and the footnotes lead to the rest as needed. While Izutsu seems to be the first to apply and explain this method for the study of the Qur’ān, others have used it since.
style and focus yet they offer supporting reasons as to why this type of study is not only necessary but even preferred.

_Letting the Qur’ān Speak for Itself_

Recognizing that it is often said that any translation is in some sense a betrayal, the mere statement of letting the Qur’ān speak for itself within another language constraint seems ridiculous at best and even criminal at worst. However, Izutsu has pioneered a way that seeks to go underneath the translations and build a coherent grouping of words that run together and create an actual worldview of meaning, which he calls the “semantic Weltanschauung.”

In order to do this one must have a particular attitude as well as a specific method. The necessary attitude is:

> We should try to read the Book without any preconception. We must, in other words, try not to read into it thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Koranic ages in their effort to understand and interpret their Sacred Book each according to his particular position. We must try to grasp the structure of the Koranic world conception in its original form, that is, as it was read and understood by the Prophet’s contemporaries and his immediate followers. Strictly speaking, this must always remain an unattainable ideal, and yet at least we should do our best to approach this ideal even a step nearer.

In order to approach that seemingly unattainable ideal, he uses semantic fields. A semantic field, offering my own simple definition, is a connected collection of all the words that are related to one another within a particular worldview. This is formed by taking a word or concept and going beyond its basic meaning to find its relational meaning according to the other words that it is repeatedly associated with. That in

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18 Izutsu, _God and Man in the Koran_, 34.
19 Ibid., 74.
turn builds more relationships with other terms that create an overall coherent understanding of how that one word is relationally defined as opposed to a mere context-less definition. In view of this, each word is part of a larger relational set that ends up forming a conceptual framework for meaning and action. Within these fields and relationships there arises certain “poles” of words that act as opposites. Those pole words are then called focus words. Izutsu summarizes it as a “complicated system of oppositions that are formed, each one of them, by two poles that stand facing each other. . . In short, from the semantical point of view, the Koranic Weltanschauung is capable of being represented as a system built on the principle of conceptual opposition.”

A simple example is in order. The word kitāb has a basic meaning of book. But, as you build its field you find that it is then connected directly within the overall field of revelation (tanzīl) and God. God sends down messages (tanzīl and wahy) to prophets (nabī or rasūl) who in turn have books (kitāb) and people groups (ahl) associated with them. The book then is associated within that cycle and is connected to the larger questions of revelation and humanity’s response to it. It is that larger question of response that creates the opposition poles of belief (imān) or disbelief (kufr); and those terms become the focus words. Therefore, far more than “a book” made up of some kind of material to hold writing this term takes on new “relational” meaning and

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20 See ibid., 18-24.
21 Ibid., 74.
22 Although I am calling this a simple example here using Izutsu’s description of book (kitāb), Madigan will enlarge this whole concept to the point of his own complete book (Madigan, The Qur’ān’s Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture, 236). So, the simplicity here is only to the extent that I am describing it. Madigan’s book is an excellent example of how Izutsu’s principles, with minor adjustment, can be used to forge ahead into other fields.
23 Madigan completely enlarges this simplistic example and takes it to new levels altogether.
allows the non-Arabic speaker to create a more coherent view of how the actual term fits into the overall message and scheme of the Qur‘ānic worldview.

Building on this simplistic note, however, is an important point. Just because a word finds random association with another does not automatically put it into the other field. There needs to be a noticeable trend and repetition of the relationship in order for a word to be considered. In fact beyond repetition, Izutsu identifies seven cases for determining the importance of a verse to be used within the semantic study. I will paraphrase them briefly here and will explain them in more detail within the body of the study as needed.24 The seven cases are:

1) The passage offers a verbal definition contained within its verses.

2) Using synonyms to show meaning.

3) Determining meaning through obvious contrast.

4) Using negative evaluation (a subset of number three, and not always helpful).

5) Identifying the companion clusters of a word, i.e., wind and blow.

6) Using parallelism to show relationship and meaning.

7) Use of words outside of the normal context, whether religious or not.

Izutsu’s two books testify to the power of using this methodology to do a systematic study of the meaning and messages of the Qur’ān. In his own words, he feels it can be used “to make the Qur‘ān interpret its own concepts and speak for itself.”25

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24 The full explanation with examples can be found in Izutsu, Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur‘ān, 37-41.
25 Ibid., 3.
It is not uncommon to find books about the Qurʾān with sections that could be considered thematic and therefore could be listed within this study, but to have full books devoted to this particular focus is rare indeed. In fact, from the initial list offered in the footnote previously only the books by M. Abdel Haleem, D. Madigan, D. Marshall, J. McAuliffe, F. Rahman, and A. Wadud would be considered Qurʾānic thematic studies of this nature (of course, Izutsu’s two books are there as well). Although McAuliffe’s Qurʾānic Christians is definitely a thematic tracing the Qurʾānic concept of Christians through the Qurʾān, and therefore is suitable for inclusion in this list; I would also put it into a slightly different category because the bulk of the work involves determining the way ten varying tafsīr authors (from al-Ṭabarī, d. 310/923, to Ṭabāṭabā’ī, d. 1403/1982) have dealt with the subject. So, apart from the initial survey of the possible Qurʾānic verses to include, the focus of the work involves an excellent in-depth tafsīr investigation and analysis.26

Before moving onto the exact methodology used within this particular study of the conceptual web I want to establish some of the underlying reasons for thematic studies (as expressed by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike).27 For that, we turn to the contribution of Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) and the motivation he set forth for his oft-quoted, even controversial, work: Major Themes of the Qurʾān.

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26 This, of course, is perfectly fine and needed within the discussion, and by separating it out for comment here does not, in any way, indicate a negative reaction to the excellent scholarship represented. Realistically, Qurʾānic Christians represents the seminal collection of research about Christians as perceived within the Qurʾānic testimony and throughout the periods of the ten tafsīr writers.

27 For a detailed explanation for a Qurʾān only study from the perspective of a non-Muslim, see pages 1-20 of Marshall’s book, God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers.
Fazlur Rahman argued for the importance of thematic studies of the Qur’ān for two reasons: first of all, most of the Muslim commentaries go systematically through the Qur’ān verse by verse and therefore do not portray the connected themes that way; secondly, they often have a strong tendency to present one particular view and are quite lengthy. In an effort not to misrepresent his words, especially given the effect they have had within the Muslim community, and to allow for his own framing of the issues; let me quote the opening paragraph of his introduction in its entirety:

Muslims and non-Muslims have written extensively on the Qur’ān. The innumerable Muslims commentaries on the Holy Book often take the text verse by verse and explain it. Quite apart from the fact that most of these project tendentious points of view, at great length, by the very nature of their procedure they cannot yield insight into the cohesive outlook on the universe and life which the Qur’ān undoubtedly possesses. More recently, non-Muslims as well as Muslims have produced topical arrangements of the Qur’ānic verses; although these can in varying degree serve the scholar as a source or an index, they are of no help to the student seeking to acquaint himself with what the Qur’ān has to say on God, man, or society. It is therefore hoped that the present work will respond to the urgent need for an introduction to the major themes of the Qur’ān.28

Within this paragraph, Rahman acknowledges that most of the commentaries (past and present he says later on) do not go deeply into the coherent message of the Qur’ān.29 He goes on to describe in the next pages the way that Western scholarship had also failed (up until not long before the publication of his Major Themes of the Qur’ān, and he singles out Izutsu for praise by name) to do justice to the overall themes of the Qur’ān

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28 Rahman, Major Themes of the Qur’ān, xi.
29 Hassan Hanafi’s chapter entitled, “Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur’ān” agrees in principle with Rahman’s conclusions as well (in principle, I am assuming, since he does not directly quote or reference Rahman’s writings in the article) and gives even more detail to the advantages and disadvantages of “longitudinal” interpretation. Stefan Wild, The Qur’ān as Text, Vol. 27 (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 195-211.
as well.\textsuperscript{30} In his previous book, he enunciates this even more clearly by offering a brief history of the methodology of Qur’ānic exposition within Islamic juridical and theological history up to the present describing it as a “piecemeal, ad hoc, and often quite extrinsic treatment of the Qur’ān” because “the basic questions of method and hermeneutics were not squarely addressed by Muslims” but remain at what he called an “atomistic” level with a “failure to understand the Qur’ān as a deeper unity yielding a definite weltanschauung.”\textsuperscript{31} From that foundation then, he marched forward to offer a more coherent, thematically based description of the major themes of the Qur’ān and specifically to outline a complete worldview of God’s final and ultimate message to humanity.

As one might immediately imagine, Rahman’s words have not been received well by some and it sparked quite an exchange of views. Although in this study I am not really interested in the whole debate about Rahman and other “modernistic” voices,\textsuperscript{32} one quote is in order from Abdullah Saeed’s chapter responding to it:

> On balance, Rahman’s approach to the Qur’ān was among the most original, daring and systematic of the mid to late twentieth century. His emphasis on the context of the revelation has had far reaching influence on the debate among Muslims of questions such as human rights, women’s rights and social justice. Rahman’s approach has been utilised by an increasing number of Muslims to relate the Qur’ān to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Rahman, \textit{Major Themes of the Qur’ān}, xii-xvi.
\item \textsuperscript{32} More and more voices are emerging, with varying labels, but the point is that Islam is in a sense searching for relevant ways to keep the imperative, timelessness of the Qur’ān in step with the current issues facing the \textit{ummah} and the world. Four specific books addressing such issues are Farid Esack, \textit{Qur’ān, Liberation & Pluralism : An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression} (Oxford, England ; Rockport, MA: Oneworld, 1997), 288.; Omid Safi, \textit{Progressive Muslims : On Justice, Gender and Pluralism} (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 351.; Taji-Farouki, \textit{Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur’ān}, 342; Daniel W. Brown, \textit{Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought}, Vol. 5 (Cambridge, England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 185.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
contemporary needs; it will likely continue to be influential among the younger generation of Muslim intellectuals. Setting the controversy aside, the importance of Rahman’s work and principles is the recognition of the need for a systematic, connected reading of the Qur’ān instead of a fragmented, “atomistic” one.

Another voice worth noting here is the recent work of Daniel Madigan. Building on the methodology of Izutsu, Madigan painstakingly analyzed the semantic fields connected with kitāb in order to determine the complex self-understanding of the Qur’ān. A number of his conclusions will be referenced within the body of my research because they directly affect this study, and hence do not need many words here; but one thing is clear from his work: the Qur’ānic self understanding is far from simplistic. Even with the usefulness of “deep word” studies and comprehensive research utilizing semantic fields it seems that the usage of kitāb remains elusive. He summarizes one of his hypotheses as:

In calling itself kitāb the Qur’ān cannot be suggesting that it is a bounded corpus, since it rejects calls to behave as a strictly delimited canon and insists on remaining responsive to and engaged with the human situation it addresses. Though cognizant of other kinds of writing, it reserves the root k-t-b almost exclusively for divine activity, or for attempts to imitate it. The term kitāb functions as a symbol for divine knowledge and authority, so the Qur’ān’s kutub do not constitute a kind of library or archive of independent volumes. Their plurality should rather be understood as indicating the continuity of the manifestations of God’s authoritative knowledge.

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34 Connecting kitāb to the Qur’ān and its self understanding is based in part from the fact that Al-Ṭabarānī considers it one of the four names of the revelation given to Muhammad. The other three names are qur’ān, furqān, and dhikr. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 1:67-70; cf. Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, 130.
35 Plural of kitāb, footnote does not appear in the original quote.
36 Ibid., 145.
This point will become increasingly important as we build upon the semantic fields associated with the previous revelations.

Before leaving this rich subject of methodology there is one more important point in favor of a thematic, Qurʾān only kind of study. It is the principle of exegesis outlined by Ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) in his *Introductory Treatise on the Principles of Tafsīr,*\(^{37}\) translated by J. McAuliffe in *Windows on the House of Islam.* Ibn Taymiya writes, “If someone asks, ‘What is the best method of interpretation?’ the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qurʾān is interpreted through the Qurʾān. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another.”\(^{38}\) Therefore, the practice of letting the Qurʾān “speak” for itself as I am currently outlining is exactly what Ibn Taymiya is advocating here as his first point of correct exegesis. Of course, he goes on to mention the role of the Sunna of the Prophet, the Companions, the Followers, and personal opinion (raʾy) as well. But, the first and best way is using the Qurʾān to define itself. In this, Ibn Taymiya was echoing a basic principle of tafsīr, namely, that first and foremost, the Qurʾān’s own self-understanding and exegesis is of utmost importance.\(^{39}\) Traditional Qurʾān commentaries agreed but combined this with the Prophet’s tafsīr (in hadith), that of the companions, and others. With that principle in place, and the preceding discussion as a foundation, I now turn to an explanation of my personal

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\(^{38}\) Ibid., 36.

methodology, keeping in mind that even though I am extolling the virtue of the Qurʾān’s own self-commentary, I myself am doing the arranging and jumping into the commentarial fray.
CHAPTER 3
THE CONCEPTUAL WEB

This chapter is broken into two main sections. In the first part, I describe the main steps of the methodology that I used to create a Qur’ānic conceptual web relating the Qur’ān to the previous revelations, which are as follows: 1) looking up each verse that included one of the named revelations; 2) finding other words associated with those verses to extend the semantic field; 3) sorting through all of the verses that were associated with the word for book (kitāb) and other words to determine if the verses actually referenced one of the revelations; 4) taking that larger list and putting it through three more specific questions to arrive at the smaller list of verses to study in depth to create the web. In the second part, I discuss the five primary component parts and fields of this web of meaning which are: 1) God’s general guidance; 2) specific, named guidance or revelations; 3) specific names associated with the named revelations; 4) a few distant correlated words; and 5) the response circle.

The Creation of the Web

The actual construction of what I call the conceptual web of what the Qur’ān teaches regarding the previous revelations started with the named revelations of the Tawrāt, Zabūr, and Injīl, commonly considered to be the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel in
English. Using the concordance of the Qurʾān by H. Kassis\(^{40}\) each word was looked up, and each verse read (in Arabic and English)\(^{41}\) in order to determine any other necessary words within the semantic field of those terms. So, even though the Qurʾān only mentions those named books a total of 18, 9, 12 times respectively, the list of possible verses immediately grew to include other linked terms like āyah,\(^{42}\) kitāb, dhikr, and kalimah.

As an example of verses creating what Izutsu considered a synonymous relationship,\(^{43}\) one that thereby offers a connection between Tawrāt and kitāb consider the following from al-Māʾidah 5:43-44:

\[
\text{إِنَّ آلِ الْقُرْآنِ فِيهَا طُورُّ يَحْكُمُ فِيهَا حُكْمُ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يَوْلُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذلِكَ وَمَا أَوْلَيْكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ}
\]

But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) law (tawrāt) before them? - therein is the (plain) command of Allah; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not (really) People of Faith.

\[
\text{إِنَّ آلِ الْقُرْآنِ فِيهَا طُورُّ يَحْكُمُ فِيهَا حُكْمُ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يَوْلُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذلِكَ وَمَا أَوْلَيْكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ}
\]

It was We who revealed the law (tawrāt) (to Moses); therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets.

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\(^{40}\) Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʾān* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 1444. This is a very useful academic tool. It allows a full search of the Qurʾān in regards to its Arabic words and does not rely on any translated veil like many other search engines. The tri-letter roots are listed in English alphabetical order (to help the non-Arabist as much as possible) as well as by parts of speech listing each instance throughout the Qurʾān. Then, the actual verses referenced offer a form of a translation of the context around the word in question to allow someone to determine if the particular reference is the one being looked for. Of course, one can do online searches (mostly through translation) and recently there is a phonetic search of the Qurʾān available at: http://www.islamicity.com/Quransearch/.

\(^{41}\) Due to the limits of my Arabic skills and the efficiency of my reading Arabic (at this time), much of the research was done in English though the creation of the semantic relationships are according to the Arabic words and then supported by various translations to determine overall meaning.

\(^{42}\) I did not actually look up every verse connected to āyah due to the large number of such verses as well as the fact that āyah is often a more generic term related to God’s interaction to humanity and by itself does not directly lead to more verses pertaining to the previous revelations. However, having said that, it will play an important part in the overall understanding of God’s relating to humankind.

who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's will, by the rabbis and the doctors of
law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's book (kitāb
Allāh), and they were witnesses thereto: therefore fear not men, but fear
me, and sell not my signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by
(the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than)
Unbelievers.44

Within these two verses, of course, there are many principles and issues to unpack
later,45 but at this time, note that the word, Tawrāt, rendered law is later described as
God's book, or kitāb Allāh. Therefore, with this relationship defined here and other
places, the semantic field of words attached to the previous revelations had to include
kitāb. With that addition alone, the list of verses to be studied increased by at least 200
distinct verses. Because kitāb, often translated “book,” can have so many possible
references,46 each of the verses had to be read in context and labeled with one of the
following designations:

1. Applying directly to one of the previous revelations.

2. Applying only to the Qur’ān.

3. Applying to all of the revelations, generally or specifically, or being a group
descriptor of them.47

4. Having no direct reference to any of the desired focus, such as the book at the
day of Judgment.

44 All Qur’ānic quotations will come from DivineIslam’s Qur’ān Viewer Software v2.913 (providing both
the actual Arabic of the Qur’ān and Yusuf Ali’s translation of the meanings), with the modification of
erasing the three digit verse numbering system and making all references consistent within this document
to include the name of the chapter followed by number and verse range.

45 Due to the sheer number of verses referenced in this research, normally only a few examples will be
given at any given time and the particular reason for using them remarked on. Comprehensive statements
with examples will be made in the next chapter from a synthesized understanding of the complete web of
meaning.

46 Verses with kalimah (word) had to be analyzed as well to determine how the verses fit into this study.

47 I had completed most of my own research before I was directed to Madigan’s book. After reading his
book it became clear that he had taken this whole subject to a depth that my own research only scratched
the surface. But, it was exciting to see that what I was finding was consonant with what he found as well.
5. Applying to the reference, the People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb). The final designation, People of the Book, was also studied to determine whether or not it added anything to the overall discussion.48

From that increasing list each verse was read and using the principles outlined by Izutsu other words began to be associated within the semantic field through definition statements, correlated words, relationships between words, and particular recurring themes. In addition to the seven cases Izutsu establishes49 to create a field of meaning, I put the verses through three additional filters to focus on particular relationships between the revelations of the Qur’ān, Torah, Psalms, and Gospel. Those relationships were identified by asking the following questions during the analysis of the verses:

1. How is the origin, scope of influence, and cosmic role of the revelations described?

2. What words are consistently listed with the revelations? Are there any unique words that describe any/all of the revelations? Are there any specific words applying ONLY to one of the books?50

3. What are the relationships or interaction principles between the revelations? Are there any hermeneutical constructs forming? Are there any sort of limiting comments or “flaws”?51

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48 This is an important subset of verses since it is the People of the Book that often receive censure and judgment from God for how they have responded to their revelations.
49 Previously listed in chapter 2.
50 The rarity of such words actually surprised me as the field grew. It seems almost without exception (which we will talk about later) that the “special” titles given to the Qur’ān within the Muslim community also apply to the previous revelations.
From this detailed process, with notes being captured in a spreadsheet (searchable by root word, verse, usage label, and overall theme description), the web began to take shape. What began as a set of three words grew to a huge corpus of verses that needed to be analyzed. The spreadsheet of all of the verses considered, though not necessarily adding to the actual conceptual meaning of the web, contained 489 distinct verses, or approximately 8% of the Qur’ān! That list was then categorized, studied, and pared down to a core of 162 verses (or 2.5% of the Qur’ān) that I saw relating directly to the subject at hand. It is from this smaller list that the best examples were taken in order to answer the three questions above (next chapter).

By moving through all of the verses and cross-referencing between them with each word involved, various patterns emerged, certain relationships took shape. As those patterns and relationships were drawn out showing the interconnectedness between the role of revelation and the named revelations, there appeared what seemed to be a sort of organic model, therefore, the word “web” seemed to fit so much better than field. Also, within a construct of a web there are rings of relationship and the possibility of movement and interaction between the layers and parts.

Parts of the Web

The moment one considers the Qur’ānic worldview, only one word is truly applicable: theocentric. All things find their source and meaning in God. Izutsu says it this way, “In the Koranic system, there is not even one single semantic field that is not

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51 Although I immediately feel blasphemous even writing such a word associated with a revelation of God, this had to be asked given the charge of tahrīf within the Islamic world and the implications that it will have in our study.

52 The full list is printed in the Appendix.
directly connected with, and governed by the central concept of Allah.”\textsuperscript{53} Therefore the description of the web begins with the very Core, the One Ultimate Point from whom all things emanate and find their being.

From this distinctive point imagine a series of concentric circles with varying radii sharing that same Origin. Now, add to those concentric circles various lines representing function and interaction between the layers, having the source ultimately in God. This is the construct that seems to best describe what I found as I studied every possible verse connected with the previous revelations. This is what I call the conceptual web. I will attempt a crude visual after describing all of the circles, but in the end it will be the mind’s eye that puts the finishing touches on this picture as I verbally describe it in the pages to come.\textsuperscript{54} For the sake of creating an integrated discussion of this web,\textsuperscript{55} I would like to describe five distinct circles that I see in relation to the previous revelations, these circles being 1) God’s general guidance; 2) specific, named guidance or revelations; 3) specific names associated with the named revelations; 4) a few distant correlated words; and 5) the response circle.

The innermost circle includes God’s act of sending guidance (\textit{hudā}) to humanity. It is through His grace and mercy that He speaks to humanity in many ways and the way in which human beings respond to that guidance determines their final destiny. The Qur’ān describes both humanity’s need of and the role of guidance in this way in \textit{Al-Baqarah} 2:38-39:

\begin{quote}
فَلَنَا أُهِبْطَوْا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِنَّمَا يَأْتِيُّكُمْ مِنْ هَذِهِ هُدَى فَمَنْ تَبَعَهَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلاَ حُفُوصُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53} Izutsu, \textit{God and Man in the Koran}, 41.
\textsuperscript{54} See Figure 1 at the end of the chapter.
\textsuperscript{55} Obviously, the scope of this study is larger than can be fully described in the pages of a Master’s Thesis, I will therefore have to limit discussions at various points to allow for the logical progression to continue.
We said: “Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance (ḥudā) from me, whosoever follows My guidance (ḥudā), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أَوَلَّاهُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْأَنْقَرِ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

“But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein.”

From this clear pronouncement, God establishes the first functioning circle of guidance in the form of His signs (āyāt). An āyāh (singular of āyāt) can be described in many ways but can simply be understood to be any sign of God (whether verbal or nonverbal)\(^5\) that moves a person towards acceptance (taṣdiq – lit. “regarding, and accepting, as true”) or rejection (takdhīb – lit. “regarding as false”).\(^5\) This can include nature in its myriad forms of witness and praise to God: the sky, lightning, wind, and rain to name a few;\(^5\) or it can be a clear spoken message from God himself to humanity through one of His prophets throughout time since an āyāh is also a verse in one of the revealed books.\(^5\) This last possibility can be described as God’s speech (kalām Allāh).

Within this first, more general circle of guidance the words kalimah (word) and dhikr (remembrance) need to be added as God uses them to call humanity back to himself.

The second circle is more like a specific application of the first circle and is comprised of the actual scriptures given by God through time to various messengers or prophets. Although not all of these are named, and includes certain non-specific

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\(^5\) For a full explanation of the role of āyāh see ibid., 133-150. It should also be noted, however, that in Madigan’s work he expresses concern that Izutsu did not recognize the negative aspects of āyāh as within his schema. Madigan goes on to share that there is no instance of the verb šaddaqa being used with āyāh. For further applications and implications, see Madigan, *The Qurʾān’s Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, 102.

\(^5\) Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 136.

\(^5\) Q 30:20-25; 41:37.

descriptive words like ṣuhuf (pages), kitāb (book), and lāwḥ (tablet); its main focus for the purposes of this study includes the names: Tawrāt, Injīl, Zabūr, and Qur’ān. Each of these revelations have an intact relationship at this level with all of them at one time or another being called God’s words, remembrances, or signs and all of them finding their origin through God’s direct activity; thereby creating a equal relationship in that sense. Each has a particular role to play in regards to each other and the respective people to which they are sent. Each and every named revelation in this list comes from God as His word and therefore He vouchsafes their protection. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

The third circle includes all of the words that are associated with at least two of the named revelations (sometimes more than two) and can be considered both descriptions of them as well as identifying functions that the revelations play in God’s plan of guidance for humanity. Some of these words include: maw’īzah (admonition or exhortation), dhikr (remembrance or reminder), ḥikmah (wisdom, often tied to “the book” or al-kitāb), nūr (light), mīzān (balance or scales), bayyinah (manifest sign or clear proof), and fūrqa (criterion, judgment, or even salvation).

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60 These are the main ones for this study. There are other named scriptures like the “the earlier ṣuhuf” in Q 20:133 and 87:19; or the ones associated with Abraham (Q 87:19) and Moses (Q 53:36 and 87:19).
61 All of the revelations named are directly connected with the same root of revelation: *N Z L; either nazzala (II), tanzīl, anzala (IV), unzila. I will discuss this more fully in chapter four.
62 This is based on the idea that God sends down His words and signs. It is those words that are clearly expressed in those revelations. In multiple places in the Qur’ān, God emphatically says that He will protect His words and that no one can alter them! See: Q 6:34, 115; 10:64, 82; 15:9; and 18:27.
63 Instead of listing each and every instance of the word, I will offer a few verses that establish the reason for the particular word being in this list.
64 Q 3:138; 5:46.
65 Q 21:48, 50, 105.
67 Q 4:174; 5:15, 44, 46; 6:91.
68 Q 42:17; 57:25.
69 Q 2:87, 92, 99, 211, 253, 16:44; and many more. This word often appears with āyah.
In addition to these beautiful words there is another that raises the value of these revelations beyond any human realm. They are called a rahmah (mercy). This is the same root that appears at the beginning of each chapter except one in the Qur’ān in the Basmallah: “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” Both words translated here gracious and merciful come from the same root signifying mercy. M. Ayoub touches at the depth of their meaning this way: “The words Raḥmān and Raḥīm both signify mercy. Raḥmān, however, is the intensive form of the noun. God’s mercy as Raḥmān encompasses the entire creation, whereas His mercy as Raḥīm is limited to His faithful servants.” With this powerful root connection, it seems that all of revelation is both an offer of mercy as well as a guidance to mercy. The phrase, “as a guidance [hudā] and a mercy [rahmah]” occurs twelve times and is even paired with three special words: dhikrā (reminder), imām (leader), and shifā’ (healing). Interestingly enough, the usage of imām applies to the book of Moses, and shifā’ is applied to the Qur’ān and is one of the terms that is only used with the Qur’ān.

The fourth circle moving outward towards humanity holds certain correlated words that effect opportunities for people to show their decisions regarding God’s

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70 Q 2:53, 185; 3:4; 21:48; 25:1. Again note that even though this is one of the four names al-Ṭabarī attributes to the Qur’ān it is also directly used for the Torah as well.
71 Q 11:17; 28:43; 46:12.
72 All but chapter 9 (sūrat al-Tawbah or al-Bara’ah) contains the Basmallah in the beginning, but it is repeated in another chapter twice therefore the total number of occurrences equals the number of chapters in the Qur’ān: 114.
74 Madigan, The Qur’ān’s Self Image : Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture, 133.
76 Q 29:51.
77 Q 11:17.
78 Q 17:82.
revelations or are given in response to their choices. These are not directly associated with the revelations themselves and therefore do not show up within circle three, but they are often closely connected to the human response to those revelations and therefore act as signifiers of their individual or corporate faith choice. Keep in mind that Izutsu describes the process of guidance leading to either belief (īmān) or unbelief (kufr), therefore, these particular words focus on signs of faith. I have not chosen to focus on all the particular correlate words associated with disbelief. Rather, here are a few positive words that my research revealed: 'ahd and mīthāq (covenant);81 'așhab al-jannah (companions of the Garden);82 kiflayn min ir-raḥmatihi (double portion of His mercy),83 and finally as-sabt (the Sabbath).84

The final circle includes any of the words associated with the description of those who follow and those who do not. So, on the one hand, there is the call at this

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79 Izutsu deals with this in a number of places. See, Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, 188.
80 Madigan has a full comprehensive list of all the semantic field relationships connected to kitāb, ḥukm, and 'ilm since he establishes that kitāb is actually a focus-word within the Qurʾān (Izutsu did not see that). Madigan, *The Qurʾān’s Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, 145-165. Therefore, in those complete lists one could extend my list by pursuing each word to determine if they were connected with the previous revelations as well to find other distant correlates. At this time, I am only discussing the ones my research unearthed.
81 Q 2:41, 91; 3:81, 187; 5:13; 9:111. The issue of covenant in the Qurʾān has been dealt with in a Ph.D. dissertation by Robert Darnell. The connection of covenant being so clearly tied to the previous revelations and the experience of the People of the Book is quite interesting, especially with the idea of both Jews and Christians “forgetting” the covenant made with God. It seems the onus is therefore on the Muslim community to do a better job. Darnell, Jr., Robert Carter, “The Idea of Divine Covenant in the Qurʾan” (Ph. D., University of Michigan).
82 Q 46:14, connected closely with 46:12.
83 Q 57:28, connected to the section of verses 26-29 based on previous revelations and accepting the new revelation. Believing all of them, therefore, receives a double portion of His mercy.
84 This is an interesting connection based on two verses. The first one is Q 2:65, where it is connected with the Covenant on Sinai and within the larger section of 2:62-66, culminating with the aspect of Sabbath being a lesson (mawʾīẓah) for those who fear God (al-muttaqīn). Being as both of those words are directly related to the web (circles three and five), Sabbath keeping has an interesting connection. The next verse is Q 4:47 where God calls to the People of the Book to believe in the revelations and not to be cursed as the Sabbath breakers were previously (see Q 2:65). It is also interesting to note that the theme of forgetting the covenant is an issue for both Jews and Christians in the Qurʾān and the Sabbath command is about remembering the covenant between man and His Creator.
level to respond to the revelations and move forward in faith through the correlate words, through the revelations and onward to a clearer knowledge of God. Whereas, if someone refuses to accept the messages of the revelations (as well as the other signs and correlate words) they are called other names and descriptors. The consistency in which these words are associated with belief (īmān) or disbelief (kufr) of the revelations is quite amazing and clearly identifies the sort of tension of the poles that Izutsu referenced. 85 Depending on each person’s response to the revelations (all of them) determines not only one’s relation to God but also their destiny. Instead of listing the various words that end up in this circle, I would rather let the Qur’ān clearly speak for itself by quoting a few concise sections of scripture.

The first selection juxtaposes both the positive and negative possibilities in one powerful verse from Al Nisā’ 4:136:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ أَمَلُواْ أَمْلَىٰ بِاللهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالَّذِينَ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْكِتَابُ الَّذِينَ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِ نَزْلَةً مِّنْ قِبَلِهِم وَمِنْ يَكْفُرُ بِاللهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِ وَالْيَوْمَ الآخر فَقَدْ ضَلَّ فِي ضَلَالٍ بَعِيدًا

O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture which He hath sent to His Messenger and the scripture (al-kitāb) which He sent to those before (him). Any who denieth Allah, His angels, His Books (kutub), His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment, hath gone far, far astray.

Clearly in this verse, believers believe in all the books (note the distinct usage of book in the plural, kutub) whereas those that deny have gone far astray. In this verse (like many others) the words for belief and disbelief appear in stark contrast. The additional word describing going far astray (dalāl) is also a common negative judgment in the fifth

85 Izutsu, God and Man in the Koran, 30-34.
circle and in the semantic field associated with disbelief (kufr). Another example of this
definition of belief is found in Al Baqarah 2:285:


The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his
Lord, as do the men of faith (mu‘minūn). Each one (of them) believeth in
Allah, His angels, His books (kutub), and His messengers. “We make no
distinction (they say) between one and another of His messengers.” And
they say: “We hear, and we obey: (We seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord,
and to Thee is the end of all journeys.”

Now the list includes both Muḥammad (as Messenger) and men of faith (mu‘minūn) as
believing in all the revelations. In addition to these clear connections to the word
belief, in other verses the revelations are also joined with those who fear God
(muttaqīn).66

On a less faithful note, one last example will suffice from Al Baqarah 2:97–99:

Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel—for he brings down the (revelation)
to thy heart by Allah's will, a confirmation of what went before, and
guidance and glad tidings for those who believe,-

Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and messengers, to Gabriel
and Michael,—Lo! Allah is an enemy to those who reject Faith.

We have sent down to thee Manifest Signs (ayat); and none reject them
but those who are perverse.

66 Q 2:2 in reference to the Qur‘ān, and Q 21:48 for that which was delivered to Moses.
In contrast to the previous themes, this verse identifies those that reject the signs of God as perverse (fāsiqūn) and enemies (‘adūw) in addition to being disbelievers. Given that all of the revelations are clearly associated within the sphere of manifest signs, this verse gives a clear warning to any who deny any of God’s messages.

These few examples are indicative of a clear trend within the overall message of the Qur’ān: God has sent (is sending) guidance to humanity, that guidance includes all of the revelations without any sort of hierarchy in place (as the next chapter will further display), and the final eschatological placement of each individual is dependent upon their response to God’s guidance. Abu-Hamdiyyah goes on to describe this connecting role of revelation as:

The invisible thread going through all things in the creation ends with God. Thus gaining knowledge and learning is like getting hold of one end of the invisible thread at the lowest level and proceeding to higher levels. Eventually, according to this, the end of the road would be reached leading us to God.\(^87\)

In brief, the five integral parts of the web are as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; and those beautiful words, in general, establish the thread of God’s guidance. The following is a graphic representation of the concentric circles. In the next chapter I turn to the three questions being asked of the full conceptual web.

From the Center, God sends messages in all directions; each of the five bands can draw humanity closer or further depending on the individual’s own reaction to the truths.
CHAPTER 4
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE REVELATIONS

Based on the infrastructure of the Qur’ānic web of different scriptures (explained in chapter three), answers to the following three questions previously described in the personal methodology section become clear:

1. How is the origin, scope of influence, and cosmic role of the revelations described?
2. What words are consistently listed with the revelations? Are there any unique words that describe any/all of the revelations? Are there any particular words applying ONLY to one of the books?
3. What are the relationships or interaction principles between the revelations? Are there any hermeneutical constructs forming? Are there any sort of limiting comments or “flaws”?

The Qur’ānic answers to these questions, in sum are: a) God is the source of the revelations; b) nearly all of the special words associated with the named revelations apply to more than one revelation and no discernible hierarchy can be seen; c) two distinct cycles emerge and no sustainable charge of corruption can be made from the Qur’ānic testimony. These three questions flesh out the bare structure of the web and give it a more fluid expression connecting the circles together and showing the interrelatedness of the web. The net effect of this chapter in the end is to establish a
coherent, Qur’ānic statement about the previous revelations, a statement that will
include an overview of recent research into the theory of taḥrīf, which is perhaps the
key concept this thesis addresses.

*Origin, Influence, and Role of the Revelations*

First, concerning the origin of revelations, the answer is most certainly “God.”
Within the theocentric worldview of the Qur’ān, as I have already mentioned, all things
come from God and return to Him as it says in,

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلاَّ عَلَدَنَا حَزَائِبُهُ وَمَا نَزْلَتْهُ إِلَّا يَقِدَرُ مَعَلُومٌ

And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible)
are with Us; but We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable
measures (al-Ḥijr 15:21).

However vaguely that principle may be understood in relation to some aspects of our
lives (especially in the current secular worldview); in reference to all the revelations,
their genesis in God is undeniable. There is no distinction made between the Qur’ān
and the previous revelations regarding their source.

In fact the actual root used repeatedly (root form n-z-l as in nazzala (II) and
‘anzala (IV) to mean “to send down”), seems to be reserved almost entirely for
supernatural use.88 M. Abu-Hamdiyyah described it this way: “It is to be noted that the
Qur’ān uses the ubiquitous (mentioned more than two hundred times) religious idiom
‘God sending down’ to refer to the Book, the Qur’ān, the remembrance, the angels, the

88 Madigan offers more commentary on this issue. Madigan, *The Qurʾān’s Self Image: Writing and
Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, 139.
Torah, the Evangel, wisdom, and so on, to His servants (creatures).” Izutsu goes so far as to say emphatically, “Tanzīl can never be used in reference to an occurrence of speech act between man and man. The ‘basic’ meaning of the word, in which, in this case, etymology makes itself felt with particular clearness, forbids it to be applied except to supernatural communication.” Therefore within the full view of the Qurʾān, the previous revelations have the same source.

Second, regarding the actual sphere of influence and role of the revelations at different places in the Qurʾān the previous revelations and the Qurʾānic message are each described in such a way as to imply three overlapping roles: 1) a universal message to humanity without being bound to a time or place; 2) a specific message to a group in some way or another; and 3) a sufficient message if obeyed. Let me give some examples of this since it could be seen as being contradictory if taken out of the context of the full conceptual web.

The first example shows the overlapping roles played by the Torah and the Gospel as universally applicable guides to all of humanity:

\[
\text{“نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَنَّعًا لَّمَآ بِنَيَّنَهُ وَنَزَّلَ الْخَلْقَ وَالْإِلَيْهِ.”}
\]

It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)

\[
\text{“مِنْ قَبْلِ هَذِهِ لِلنَّاسِ وَنَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ الْلَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ فَحَقُّ التَّقَدُّم.”}
\]

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90 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 153. For a deeper discussion than either of these three authors, see Wild, *The Qurʾān as Text*, 298.
91 As Rahman expressed the need for balanced views of the Qurʾān’s message (as I quoted before), the presence of all three of these views within the Qurʾān referencing the other revelations can be used quite detrimentally by opponents of the Qurʾān and/or the previous revelations (or both).
before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Then those who reject Faith in the Signs of Allah will suffer the severest penalty, and Allah is Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution (Al ‘Imrān 3:3-4).

In the above verse the Torah and the Gospel are described as being revelations that are universal in their application yet in other verses they are connected to a people and it might be assumed, that particular time. This next example shows that apparent contrast, coming from,

وَكَيْلًا وَأَرْبَعَينَ مَوْسِعًا الْكِتَابَِ وَجَعَلَهَا هِذَى لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَلاَّ تَتَخَذُّوا مِنْ ذَلِكَ دُونِي

We gave Moses the Book, and made it a Guide to the Children of Israel, (commanding): “Take not other than Me as Disposer of (your) affairs.” (al-Isrā’ or Banū Isrā’il 17:2).

Examples of this particular phenomena can be found applying to the Qur’ān as well.

Again, let me offer an example of each case to establish the full point of this discussion in regards to all of the revelations. Here is just one example of the Qur’ān being a message to humanity is found in al-Baqarah 2:185:

شَهِرٌ رَمَضَانُ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ هَذَا لِلنَّاسِ وَبِيْنَاتَ مَنْ كَانَ مُعِينًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفْرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامِ أَحَدٍ يَرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيَتَمَّ مُكَثْثِرًا فَوَتَكُلُّوا بَعْدَ الْعَدَدِ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَلَا يَرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعَسَرُ وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمُ الْعُسْرُ وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمُ الْغِدَارُ

Ramadhan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur’ān, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (Between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (Should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful.
And the more “localized” description is enunciated in al-Shūrā 42:7:

كَذَٰلِكَ أُحْيِيْنَكَ إِلَيْكَ فَرَآناً عَرَبِيًّا عَنْذَرَ أَمَّ الْقُرْءَةِ وَمِنْ حَوْلَتِهَا وَنَتَذَّرْ يَوْمَ الْجَمِيعُ لاِ رَبِّ فِيهِ فِرْيقٌ في الجَلَّةِ وَفِرْيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ

Thus have We sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Qur‘ān: that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and all around her, and warn (them) of the Day of Assembly, of which there is no doubt: (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the Blazing Fire.

As one considers the full import of these various verses in light of the web structure it seems clear that guidance plays a dual role affecting all of humanity and the specific people to whom the guidance is revealed. That in and of itself is not contradictory.92

The third prominent aspect of scope has to do with the idea of the revelations being sufficient for their time and place (and even beyond) at least for those who desire piety (muttaqīn). As I just displayed above, some verses are attached to the revelations to the Children of Israel or to the town of Mecca, whereas in other verses the truths apply to all humanity or to all those who desire righteousness. It is this concept of muttaqīn that seems to be the connecting link: each of the revelations are given to those who desire piety.

There are two words that Mir connects with piety. Both of them have shown up in the verses I have previously assessed. They are birr and taqwā. He describes them quite nicely with the following phrases, “to be true, loyal, dutiful,” “to fulfill one’s oath,” “wariness,” “piety,” “God-mindedness,” or “God-consciousness.”93 Each show up in the lists of the truly faithful and specifically the word, muttaqīn, one who has taqwā, is

92 Depending on one’s view of the revelations, some may misuse either side of this issue to bolster their claims. A holistic view, however, allows for a better description of guidance throughout time instead of a concept of dueling revelations.
93 Mir, Dictionary of Qur‘ānic Terms and Concepts, 156.
a main word describing those who accept God’s guidance. As previously noted in circle four of the web, various things are shown to be connected to the muttaqīn such as the Sabbath, covenant, and belief in all of the revelations. ⁹⁴ Here are two examples of the role muttaqīn plays in connecting the various revelations. The first one is from al-Anbiyā’ 21:48:

ولقد أتينا موسى وعزرائهما الفرقان ونصباهما وذكرنا للمنثرين

In the past We granted to Moses and Aaron the criterion (for judgment), and a Light and a Message for those who would do right (muttaqīn).

The next example connecting all of the books comes from the powerful introduction of the second sūrah. I will quote four verses to show its intactness and connection to what I have been saying to this point, al-Baqarah 2:2-5:

ذلك الكتاب لآتت فيه خاتمة للمنثرين

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah (muttaqīn);

الذين يؤمنون بالغيب ويعتمدون الصلاة وهم رضونهم يفعلون

Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them;

والذين يؤمنون بما أنزل إليك وما أنزل من قبلك وبالأخير هم يوفقون

And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter.

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that Mir also associates the word taqwā as a “sole requisite of salvation” and therefore its connection to the correlate words in circle four indicates a further aspect of study to determine what role (from the Qur’ānic perspective) the correlate words might play in one’s salvation. Ibid., 156.
They are on (true) guidance, from their Lord, and it is these who will prosper.

In this section all of the components seem to come together: guidance for the righteous involving belief in the revelations (all of them).

The third part of this relationship under investigation is that each of the specific scriptures are sufficient for guidance for the believer. In at least one place the earlier revelations are in themselves sufficient for faith if people would obey.\(^95\) There is no disparaging remark associated with them at all.\(^96\) In fact, in a verse I already referenced in the correlate list, there is a direct blessing given to those who espouse all of the revelations (implying a hermeneutic principle that will be one of the foci of the next section).

All of the books are integral to God’s plan of guidance to humanity to the point that Madigan sees them as being the connecting link between the two essential aspects of *hukm* and ‘ilm (authority and knowledge) within the Qur’an. In other words, as already stated, God’s process is to give commands and teachings through revelation (*tanzīl*) to prophets (*nabī/rasūl*) and it is therefore a mercy (*raḥmah*) to the world. The actual “books” therefore are the connecting focus word for that whole process.\(^97\)

In light of this view, some have wondered about the use of *kitāb* throughout the Qur’an and whether or not it is used in the definite form to reference one or more

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\(^95\) Q 5:47, 68.

\(^96\) This will be dealt with more fully in a few moments.

\(^97\) Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self Image : Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture*, 146-151. Madigan’s conclusions in this book, although focused on the Qur’ānic self understanding have amazing implications to this study since his work shows the metaphoric understanding of *kitāb* and that term applies equally to all of the revelations. In the above mentioned pages then, the case is made for all of the books to be the core or connecting point of God’s revelatory activity for humanity.
revealed books or if there is some other overarching meaning. That particular question is beyond the scope of our study and in some sense unnecessary given Madigan’s excellent scholarship about that very subject.\textsuperscript{98} The most significant conclusions of his that are relevant to this study are: a) the word \textit{kitāb} needs to be seen as a unitary message; b) the authority of the Qur’ānic messages rests upon consistency in the message; c) although the books are not the same, they have the same source. As Madigan himself states:

The evidence that the Qur’ān considers \textit{al-kitāb} to be unitary, and that it relies on that unity for its own claim to authority, is very strong. Furthermore, that evidence depends not just on the uncertain readings of a few verses. It is woven into the logic of the Qur’ānic apologetic and polemic. The use of the plural \textit{kutub} reflects a belief not in the existence of a celestial library but in the plurality of the manifestations of the one \textit{kitāb}, that is, the successive interventions made by God in history in order to guide humanity by making clear what God alone knows and what is God’s alone to will and command. The Qur’ān’s very claim to authority rests on there being a single, univocal, and integral \textit{kitāb}, manifested in the past and now manifest once more through the mission of the Prophet. Since as we have seen in the Qur’ān’s case, the \textit{kitāb} is always responsive to the situation it is addressing, what is remembered and recited by each community will vary. Thus, though the \textit{kutub} are not identical in their wording, they exhibit a unanimity that comes of having the same authoritative source. This understanding is expressed in the Qur’ān’s repeated claim that it is \textit{muṣaddīq} ‘confirming’ of the earlier revelations.\textsuperscript{99}

Hence, for Madigan the main elements of the interconnectedness of the various revelations are integral to the very self-concept of the Qur’ān. Building upon this, I turn to the next section regarding special words associated with the books themselves.

\textsuperscript{98} See ibid., 168-179 for more information.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 177.
Special Words, Special Revelations

Having discussed in the previous section the origin of revelation, scope of its influence, and the cosmic role of the revelations, given the amazing interconnectedness between the terms associated with all of the revelations named within the Qurʾān (especially with them all being part of the kitāb field), the issue of the uniqueness of each revelation arises. More specifically, are there any special words used for the different revelations, words that can be used to determine if there was a sort of hierarchy of revelations? What I discovered is that nearly all of the words considered to be so important and connected with the Qurʾān are vouchsafing its being a revelation of God are also attributed to some or all of the previous revelations (as I listed in the previous chapter regarding circle three), without there being any distinction among them. In fact, the Qurʾān solidly affirms the “equality” of revelations such as this clear statement:

قُلَّ آمِنتُ بِاللهِ وَمَا أَنزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أَنزَلَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَحْقُنَ وَالأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أَوْتِيَ مُوسَى وَعُيُونٌ وَالثَّيُوبُ مِن رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Say: “We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam)” (Āl Ḥmām 3:84).

As I already mentioned in a previous chapter, the list of connected terms in circle three even includes the four definitive names historically attributed to the Qurʾān like kitāb,
furqān, dhikr, and even Qur’ān as a word, is used in a few instances in Islamic tradition to reference the previous revelations as well.\textsuperscript{100}

Having found that consistent pattern, I was intrigued with two different situations. The first one has to do with a few descriptive words only associated with the Qur’ān (contextually), such as azīz (great or sublime),\textsuperscript{101} karīm (noble, generous),\textsuperscript{102} muhaymin (assuring),\textsuperscript{103} to name a few. The group is not large and the words associated seem to play more the part of adjectives to the current revelation being received and responded to at the time. As the next section will show much more clearly, there is no doubt that some of the descriptions attributing greatness or wisdom to the message Muḥammad received were made in order to place both the quality and role of the Qur’ān within the already revered place of the previous revelations. So, instead of seeing these terms as placing it above the other revelations (and thereby contradicting a number of very clear verses I have already listed) it is more of an identifying mark of the same Author being affirmed within the beauty and consistency of the Qur’ānic message, like that of those before.

The second intriguing aspect was regarding one term used with the Torah but not the Qur’ān. The Torah is described as being completed (tamām)\textsuperscript{104} as a guide and a mercy for people in al-An’ām 6:154:

\begin{quote}
ثُمَّ تَأْتِيَ مَوْسِعِ الْكِتَابِ تَمَامًا عَلَى الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ وَتَفَصِّيْلًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهَذَى وَرَحْمَةً لِلْعَلَّمِ بَلْقَاءٍ رَبِّهِمْ
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{100} Regarding the discussion of the usage of Qur’ān as a word, see ibid., 127-130.
\textsuperscript{101} Q 41:41, though it should be noted that this is actually attached to the word, dhikr.
\textsuperscript{102} Q 56:77. This could be related to the concept of recitation instead of being a direct name attached to the name book the Qur’ān. Again, Madigan’s conclusions affect the reading of such verses.
\textsuperscript{103} Q 5:48.
\textsuperscript{104} This is the same root used in Q 5:3 for the perfecting of the religion of Islam.
Moreover, We gave Moses the Book, completing (Our favour) to those who would do right, and explaining all things in detail, and a guide and a mercy, that they might believe in the meeting with their Lord.

The fact that this word “completing” (tamāman) is the same root word of “completed my favour upon you,” (atmamtu) in the āyā “This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you,” a word that is associated with the perfecting of the religion of Islam in al-Mā‘idah 5:3, is significant because of the proximity to the perfection of the Islamic faith given to Prophet Muhammad and therefore suggests a similar “completion” to the Book of Moses.

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than Allah; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety. This day have those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion: yet fear them not but fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, Allah is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (al-Mā‘idah 5:3).

Again, this connection, which suggests a particular quality given to the Book of Moses that is not used for any other named revelations is worthy of note, but I do not feel too much needs to be made of it except for the possibility of it adding to the concept of the sufficiency of each revelation at the time.
Taking all of these things into account, instead of finding a hierarchical layering of the purpose or quality of the texts according to the names attributed to them, I found that they are all considered valid for guidance and play the same role in the lives of the believer (or at least should). In addition to that, within circle three of the web, all of the positive words being so tightly connected with each revelation creates a bank of words representing the Divine approval and purpose for revelation without raising one above another.

*Interactive Relationships Between the Revelations*

Whereas the first two questions concerning the relationship between revelations are very clear, the answers to the third group of questions (What are the relationships or interaction principles between the revelations? Are there any hermeneutical constructs forming? Are there any sort of limiting comments or “flaws”?) paint a far more involved picture. Up to this point, the conceptual web shows the various revelations having the same source and protection by God (as His words);\(^{105}\) and the same range of descriptions of their function in the lives of the believers; but in contrast to the clear commonalities noted above, there are three major areas involving nuanced differences and commonalities concerning the interrelationship between revelations, differences and commonalities concerning first, their particular role among themselves; second, the non-existence of flaws or corrections or statements made about accuracy, some of which are statements contradicting what Muslims commonly believe; and third, there are hermeneutical constructs being formed.

\(^{105}\) Q 6:34, 115; 10:64, 82; 18:27.
My research led me to see two distinct cyclical relationships that I call the hermeneutic cycle and the validation cycle. Before I begin with the two cycles in detail, the subject of tahrīf needs to be explained further.

The accusation of tahrīf or the falsification of the previous revelations is one of the most basic Muslim arguments against the validity of the previous scriptures. Even though it seems to be a foregone conclusion in the minds of many Muslims in reference to how the Qur’ān views the previous revelations and can be found affirmed in scholarly works (as well as polemical works in abundance), a closer scrutiny of the subject actually reveals a much more complex picture and even raises serious questions when considering what the Qur’ān and early exegetes taught.

When one carefully takes the time and effort to examine all of the Qur’ānic references in regards to the previous revelations (as this study has done) and the exegetical understandings tied to them within the early tafsīr writings especially (as other recent studies have done), the picture is not as clear as the polemicists suggest or even the more academic conclusions offered through the years.

Recently due to more study about this issue, two Muslim scholars have recognized the need to reassess the current understanding of tahrīf. Mahmoud Ayoub

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106 Lazarus-Yafeh considers tahrīf a central theme in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 20. She is also the author of the “Tahri" article in the EI2 but according to G. Nickel’s recent Ph.D. dissertation he feels she “speaks with unusual freedom” regarding the Qur’ānic evidence of the charge according to footnote 176 of his work on page 29. Since this raises a serious contradiction to the common understanding of tahrīf I will describe his research in more detail in the pages to come. See G. D. Nickel, “The Theme of Tampering with the Earlier Scriptures in Early Commentaries on the Qur’an” Religious Studies, University of Calgary)...

107 Zebiri has a complete chapter identifying the writings of polemicists and their arguments (chapter 2). Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford, England ; Rockport, MA, USA: Oneworld, 1997), 44-93.

departs from the common understanding of tahrīf when stating that it does not mean that Jews and Christians altered the actual text of their scripture. Ayoub says it this way:

Contrary to the general Islamic view, the Qurʾān does not accuse Jews and Christians of altering the text of their scriptures, but rather of altering the truth which those scriptures contain. The people do this by concealing some of the sacred texts, by misapplying their precepts, or by “altering words from their right position.” However, this refers more to interpretation than to the actual addition or deletion of words from the sacred books. The problem of alteration (tahrīf) needs further study.109

and A. Saeed110 concludes his research by asserting that the development of the doctrine of tahrīf is very complex and the ensuing negative attitude towards the previous revelations held by most Muslims is outside the support of both the Qurʾān and major tafsīr authors. He states it this way:

The wholesale dismissive attitude held by many Muslims in the modern period towards the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity do not seem [to] have the support of either the Qurʾān or the major figures of tafsīr. Further research is required to explore the complexities associated with the doctrine of tahrīf and the social, political and intellectual contexts in which this doctrine developed within Islam.111

In light of these two calls for a reassessment I turn to the 2004 Dissertation of G. Nickel entitled “The Theme of ‘Tampering with the Earlier Scriptures’ in Early Commentaries of the Qurʾān” for two explicit reasons. First of all, his is one of the most recent studies dealing with, in minute detail, every single verse in the Qurʾān that has ever been related to the charge of distortion and then researching each of those verses through

110 Abdullah Saeed is the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and the Director of the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam at the University of Melbourne, Australia.
two particular tafsīr authors. Secondly, in his methodology of semantic fields (from Izutsu as well), he unearths startling conclusions concerning the relationship between the accusation of corruption in the Qurʾān and the presence of the need for the Qurʾān to confirm the previous revelations (which is the foundation for the validation cycle I am suggesting).

Revisiting Tahrīf

Nickel begins by establishing a very important difference between polemical writings and full Qurʾānic commentaries like Muqātil and Ṭabarī.\(^{112}\) Whereas a polemicist can argue any point and choose verses at will, Nickel argues that an exegete of a tafsīr is bound to reference and deal with the whole of Qurʾānic scripture.\(^{113}\) Therefore, any conclusions will have to be in line with the overall message of the Qurʾān as it regards previous revelations.\(^{114}\) Not only will the verses that have been historically attached to the falsification charge be explained but all the other references will also be illuminated and kept in mind. Interestingly enough, it is the sheer immensity of the praise offered in the other references about the scriptures that create such a powerful framework for the discussion by the exegetes and the issues they see to be most important. Saeed enunciates this systematic reality this way: “In no verse in the Qurʾān is there a denigrating remark about the scriptures of the Jews

\(^{112}\) The authors and their books are Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), Ṭafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān; and Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ‘an Taʿwil al-Qurʾān. For more information regarding both of these tafsīr authors see Nickel’s full explanation for why he used their particular books. Muqātil has been criticized for his use of Israʿīliyyāt in his writings and even censored in one Muslim country.


\(^{114}\) Ibid.32.
and the Christians. Instead there is respect and reverence. Any disparaging remarks were about the People of the Book, individuals or groups, and their actions.  

In Nickel’s preliminary survey of what the Qur’ān says about the Tawrāt, Injīl, and Zabūr and other phrases and words attributed to the previous revelations he saw a number of points emerge: 1) “specific references to earlier scriptures seem to be uniformly positive and respectful.” 2) The revelations are repeatedly considered to be confirmed by the Qur’ān (the term muṣaddiq, from sadaqa II) and the Qur’ānic message has a correspondence with the messages before it. 3) Frequently the phrases ma bayna yadayhi and mā ma`akum are connected with the earlier scriptures thereby implying access and usefulness of the text. 4) Previous revelations are used to verify the truth of the Qur’ān and the message of Prophet Muḥammad by being called on to deal with doubt. 5) Finally, “true piety” is defined as belief in the book(s) as the conceptual web shows as well.

After establishing the full view that the exegetes will have to work with Nickel then consolidates the semantic field of the roots that have been associated with the

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116 Nickel, The Theme of 'Tampering with the Earlier Scriptures' in Early Commentaries on the Qur’ān, 33.
117 Ibid.40.
119 Translated “what is with them” and similar phrases, Q 2:41, 89, 91, 101; 3:81; 4:47.
120 Nickel, The Theme of 'Tampering with the Earlier Scriptures' in Early Commentaries on the Qur’ān, 40.
121 I will reference these phrases again in a moment.
122 Q 3:93 “Bring you the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful.” and 10:94 “If thou art in doubt regarding what we have sent down to thee, ask those who recite the book before thee.” Cf. Nickel.
123 “These descriptions of the earlier scriptures in turn provide a context for the exegetical development of the motif of tampering. The exegete who wants to write about the earlier scriptures will be constrained to keep in mind what the Qur’ān itself says about them. If he chooses to go against the characterizations found in Muslim scripture, he risks his reader’s accusation of contradicting the world of Allah.” Nickel, p. 43.
tampering motif in scholarly research (as well as used in polemic discourse). These eight roots include: labisa II, to confound; verbs of concealment, katama, sarra IV, khafiya IV; baddala, to substitute; ḥarafa, to tamper with; lawā, to twist; and finally, nasiya, to forget. The tangled fields of these roots occur in 26 verses often connected with the falsification charge.

In the analyses of the verses themselves, certain interesting points come to light. 1) Every one of the 26 verses considered problematic occur within sūras 2-7 and the theme of tampering alternates with the concept of muṣaddiq (confirmation). 2) “An actual name of one of the earlier scriptures never appears as the object of a verb of tampering. Furthermore, neither the word kitāb nor any other term for a written document appears as the object of an alteration verb.” 3) Verbs of concealment are associated with written objects, but concealment presupposes a correct text available. Therefore, Nickel primes the anticipation in regards to the existing tension that has been noted by others before him and how it will be dealt with by the exegetes:

One possible expectation is that the exegete who wants to demonstrate coherence of meanings within Muslim scripture will need to consider how he can explain the verses of tampering in such a way that his explanations harmonize with the Qur’ānic characterizations of the earlier scriptures. If there is a contradiction of meaning among tampering verses, positive characterizations of earlier scriptures, and

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124 Nickel gives various authors that have identified these verbs in question on pages 44-45.
125 Ibid.43-55.
126 Ibid.58.
127 Ibid.58.
128 Ibid.105.
129 “A number of scholars who have studied the verses in the Qurʾān relevant to the tampering theme have made the claim that the words of Muslim scripture themselves do not amount to an accusation of the textual corruption of earlier scriptures.” Ibid.19. Watt first shared this view in the 1955 article, “The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible.” Specifically he said, on page 50 in the article, that there is a difference between “what the Qurʾān actually says” and “all later interpretations.” Cf ibid.
claims of a relationship of confirmation in the Qur’ān, it remains unresolved in Muslim scripture. This apparent tension heightens the anticipation of what the exegetes will do with it.\textsuperscript{130}

With that understanding culled from the actual Qur’ānic texts, he then begins his methodical research using literary analysis of what the two exegetes report in regards to the 25 verses.\textsuperscript{131} He also gives a further explanation of their style and specific strengths that Muqāṭil and Ṭabarī brought to their \textit{tafsīrs}. In addition to the systematic reporting of how Muqāṭil and Ṭabarī deal with each verse, Nickel offers another vehicle for study: the narrative structures interwoven through both commentaries.

Nickel’s thorough analysis unearths four startling conclusions. 1) The exegetes in question did not understand the tampering verses to reference actual corruption of earlier scriptures,\textsuperscript{132} though a few localized examples of tampering things related to the Torah are given. The strongest accusations of tampering are in relation to Q 2:79, 3:78, and 5:13. The alteration traditions are, however, as Nickel shares, “overshadowed in the commentaries by more dominant tampering traditions which assume the existence of authentic scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians.”\textsuperscript{133} In other words, claims of altering presupposed the availability of a correct text to show the true message. The examples given being associated with the above three verses are usually attributed to the Jews at the time of Muḥammad with a few earlier stories recounted in the

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.59.
\textsuperscript{131} He drops Q 5:77 from the 26 usually used since it does not contain a reference to an earlier scripture, confirmation or tampering. Page 55, footnote 104.
\textsuperscript{132} That agrees with Saeed’s conclusions with the exegetes that he analyzed.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.211.
traditions. The traditions themselves do not always agree and therefore according to the *tafsīr* authors are not considered conclusive proof of sustained alteration.

2) Because of the three-fold internal constraints within the Qur’ānic testimony about the previous revelations which he describes as: a) the rest of the Qur’ānic references are “uniformly positive and respectful”; b) the scriptures are seen as “touchstones of authority and verification”; and c) “the explicit claim repeated throughout these sūras is that the revelation sent down to the messenger confirms the revelation sent down before it and is ‘with’ the people of the book;” the exegetes employed a particular narrative structure to deal with this contrast between the way that the Jews responded to Muḥammad and the praise given to the revelations. Therefore, the exegetes do not conclude that the corruption of the actual texts of the scriptures has occurred.  

3) In fact, the issue of correspondence, not corruption, becomes the focal point of the stories related. “The prophethood of Muḥammad in both commentaries, therefore, is based upon the alleged continuity of his recitations with the revelations of the past, rather than upon a claim of discontinuity because those scriptures had been previously falsified.”

Finally, in response to these findings, 4) if the early exegetes did not hold the foregone conclusion of textual corruption then this raises the question about how and

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134 Ibid.212.
135 One story has Muḥammad exclaiming, “I am the first to revive one of the *sunnas* of Allah.” Or, in another version, “I impose (*qadā*) what is in the Torah.” Cf. Nickel, page 180.
136 Ibid.180.
when the doctrine of the corruption became such a pervasive theme.\textsuperscript{137} That question will be held for the final chapter of implications and issues for further study. Now, building upon Nickel’s research and conclusions, dealing with the fact that the Qur’ānic picture in and of itself (as well as some of the earliest tafsīr authors) does not attack the veracity of the previous revelations but focuses more upon the actions and unbelief of those who should have obeyed the revelations; the foundation is prepared for a more forthright discussion of the two interrelated cycles: validation and hermeneutic.

\textit{The Two Cycles}

The validation cycle has to do with the tandem relationship of prophesy and confirmation. As Nickel’s research established, the role of confirmation is a solid theme and is regularly attached to any verses considered to be the source of the corruption charge in such a way as to make the aspect of the confirming role the one which stands supreme in the overall picture. Not only is the Qur’ān called a confirmation (even a safeguard – \textit{muyahmin}) of the previous revelations, but the Gospel is called one as well of the Torah.\textsuperscript{138} Even the role of John the Baptist is given the same “job” to confirm Jesus as a word from God.\textsuperscript{139} Or, in a simplified view, this aspect of confirmation can be seen in the revelations identifying themselves from the same Source, thereby

\textsuperscript{137} He raises some suggestions that need to considered more and can be summarized in three phrases: polemics, the development of the “Islamic concept of authority,” and the later “hardening of theological understandings in Islam.” page 217. Nickel goes on to briefly describe the role that Ibn Ḥazm played in the possible genesis of that position. Given the overwhelming prevalence, even presupposition, of this position that stands in the way of fruitful Muslim and Christian interaction, this will be a subject that needs deeper study.

\textsuperscript{138} Q 3:50.

\textsuperscript{139} Q 3:39.
furthering their role as God’s words that He himself vows to protect from error. Also, it is this concept of agreement and correlation that establishes any future revelation or prophet in that they must agree with what has come before. Therefore, no sustained charge of a flaw can be made in response to the previous revelations.

On the other side of this cycle, then, is the aspect of the revelations prophesying future prophets, messages, or guidance. In a few clear passages the Qur’ān states that the previous revelations have prophesied the coming of another prophet. Therefore the people should see the connection of the role of Prophet Muhammad in line with the previous scriptures’ prophecies. Another aspect of this prophecy side of the cycle is more subtle, but nonetheless evident. When the Qur’ān urges Christians not to go beyond the constraints of their book and goes on to validate Jesus as Messiah, God’s word, and God’s spirit; God has in effect, then, approved of a Christian concept of the Psalms and the Torah that prophesied Jesus as Messiah (whom the Jews did not accept) as well as other prophets to come. So, the role of prophecy connects all of the books together as the other side of the validation cycle.

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140 A number of verses were already listed in a previous footnote, but one for immediate reference is from al-Kahf 18:27. And recite (and teach) what has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord: none can change His Words, and none wilt thou find as a refuge other than Him.”

141 Nickel’s research established this as previously mentioned.

142 This is even to the point of the potential view of revelation being ongoing. This is not, however, the general Islamic view even with verses like these: Q 10:47, 16:36.


144 Q 4:171; 5:65-77. The application of the logic of this statement is beyond the scope of this study, however, it will be noted and referenced again in the implications section. Although these words associated with Jesus have come to mean various things to both Christians and Muslims and are problematic to say the least! The fact remains that the Qur’ān validates them in light of the Christian’s understanding and affirms Jesus as Messiah (of course, the question of which Christian view and which Christological understanding is also outside the scope of this study). In addition to this thought, keep in mind that the Christians are told to obey their book in their understanding and not go beyond it. The focus
Putting both arms of prophesy and confirmation together connects all of the named revelations into a tight cycle. Going in the one direction the previous revelations prophesy the coming of others; and when the presence of that prophet receiving revelation is revealed, both are seen in the realm of confirming that which has come before in order to validate the prophetic claim and the role of the revelation that is being given. For a visual projection of this cycle, see Figure 2.
The next cycle, which I term the hermeneutic cycle, is not quite as involved. In light of the cumulative understanding of the revelations being from God, protected by God, confirming each other, and even being integrated prophetically, it easily follows that the revelations are to be considered together, in contrast to the apparent consensus of prominent Muslim scholars throughout history that revelations prior to the Qurʾān have been corrupted over time and are therefore not to be relied upon now.
The hermeneutic cycle is based on three distinct aspects: the previous texts being “present” for investigation, being quoted from, and being used for timely confirmation; the revelations having the role of taḥsil (explaining) for believers and between the revelations themselves; and, the clear command to seek guidance and answers from previous revelations to understand the current one. When all of these are considered together within the web it creates a plausible case for a revelation-based epistemology consisting of the Qur'ān and the previous revelations. I will take each section individually to show the intactness of this cycle.

The fact that the phrases ma bayna yadayhi145 and mā ma’akum146 are clearly connected with the earlier scriptures establishes the possibility and even affirmation of there being the revelations available for inspection and consideration. This is further emphasized in the following verses. The first one coming from Āl ‘Imrān 3:93,

\[
\text{كل} \text{ } \text{الطعام} \text{ } \text{كان} \text{ } \text{جاهلا} \text{ } \text{إيام إسرائيل إلا ما حرّم} \text{ } \text{إيام إسرائيل على نفسه من قبل أن تترُّوّر} \text{ } \text{ثلثين مائتين} \\
\text{بالثورة} \text{ } \text{فأنى} \text{ } \text{إن كلذم صادقين} \\
\]

All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except what Israel Made unlawful for itself, before the Law (of Moses) was revealed. Say: “Bring ye the Law and study it, if ye be men of truth.”

This verse readily agrees with some of the traditions reporting how the Torah would validate what Prophet Muḥammad was revealing.147 The next verse adds to this idea and even describes the aspect of sufficiency again, found in Al-Mā‘īdah 5:43,

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146 Translated “what is with them” and similar phrases, Q 2:41, 89, 91, 101; 3:81; 4:47.
147 See previous section dealing with Nickel’s research.
But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) law before them? - therein is the (plain) command of Allah; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not (really) People of Faith.

Adding to this aspect of inspection, possession, and confirmation there is even a verse being quoted from the previous revelations thereby assuming the ability to verify that as well.\(^{148}\)

The next part of this cycle involves the word, \(\text{taf\text{"s}il} \) (explaining distinctly) being associated with both the Qur’ān and the Torah and therefore being a necessary aspect for the faithful to find understanding in things regarding faith.\(^{149}\) Since this word is not only associated with the Qur’ān, it follows that the Torah (and other revelations of the same origin and quality from the conceptual web perspective) would also be able to provide that function for the believers.

Finally, the last piece of this cycle is based on the process of going back to the previous revelations (already present as I have already shown) if there are any questions with the current one.\(^{150}\) Considering that the Qur’ān explicitly establishes internally within the description of its revelation that certain verses are different from others;\(^{151}\) and then urges this epistemological step of going to the previous revelations

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\(^{148}\) Q 21:105. Quoting, or at least directly referencing a particular phrase that is used in Psalms 25:13, 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; and even quoted in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:5.


\(^{150}\) Yānūs 10:94. "If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be in no wise of those in doubt."

\(^{151}\) Al 'Imrān 3:7. 

هوّ الذي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الكِتَابَ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْعَلَّامَاتِ فَهَىَ الْكِتَابُ وَأُخْرَ مَنْ تَشَاءَتْهُمْ فَالَّذِينَ فِي فُلُوسِهِمْ زَيَّنُونَ ما نَسْتَبِيعُونَ مَا نَتَبِّئُهُمْ مَنْ اتَّبَعَتْهُمْ الْقَلَّةُ وَإِنْ تَعْلَمُوا تَأْوِيلَهُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا الْإِلَهَ الْعَزِيزُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعَلَّامٍ يَقُولُونَ أُمُّهُمْ إِنَّهَا فَيْتَرَكْنَاهُمْ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ عَدَيْنِ وَمَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا أَوْلِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ
in time of question makes this a valid, though uncommon, conclusion that the previous revelations are acceptable for explaining the Qur’ān. Add to this thought the fact that various verses clearly challenge those who only believe a part of the revelations and not the others and the case for this hermeneutical construct seems even stronger.\footnote{Q 2:85, 285; 3:84, 119; 4:136; 5:59, 68; 29:47.}

Although none of these individual aspects stand out too strongly, taken as a composite picture within the web makes them powerful and appropriate parts of the overall picture of the Qur’ānic view of the previous revelations. In addition to that, the very fact that each revelation is held in the same honor and grouped within the various “true faith lists” make belief in them an imperative for the true believer.\footnote{As I previously mentioned in the Introduction, this paper is not speaking to the issue of whether or not the actual revelations described in the Qur’ān are the same ones as the current Bible. That is outside the scope of this study; however, regardless of that discussion, the internal coherence of the Qur’ānic web may force certain conclusions regarding the charges of corruption to be seriously re-examined.}

In answering the three questions raised in creating the web, in this chapter I have established the Qur’ānic assertion of the Divine origin and role of all of the revelations. Also, I have shown that according to the Qur’ān, no one revelation is considered to be higher than the others; they all have the same body of terms being used to commemorate their function in God’s plan of guidance to humanity. Next, within my overview of the challenge of taḥrīf, I established the need for reassessment of the common belief that the Qur’ān teaches the corruption of the previous revelations. Finally, I argued that the Qur’ān presents two distinct cycles of relationship for understanding the internal coherence of the Qur’ānic view of the revelations.

“He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.’ and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.”
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study has created a coherent Weltanschauung of the Qur’ān in relation to the previous revelations. Throughout the study I have taken specific steps to build a conceptual web that points to the conclusion that the overall Qur’ānic picture of the previous revelations is very coherent. In a few moments I will enunciate a clear statement regarding the previous revelations in light of the study and the conceptual web. Following the summary of the study and that statement, I will elaborate on a few of the most obvious implications of this study in regards to interfaith dialog.

First, in chapter one, I established the focus and reason for this research. Subsequently, in chapter two, I began with the foundational methodology of my study basing it on the works of T. Izutsu, F. Rahman, and D. Madigan. Even more than their methodologies, their works also offered reasons for the need to do studies like this. Using the methodological tools of semantic fields (with some adjustment) this study has established a substantial core of references in which to create the chorus of verses needed to hear what the Qur’ān says. This type of study contrasts with the frequent “atomistic” approaches to the text and offers the broadest survey possible in order to grasp a coherent picture. It should be noted that this study did not directly deal with issues of timing of certain verses (such as Medinan verses in contrast to Meccan verses)
since there was no recognizable change in the Qur’ānic understanding of the revelations throughout the conceptual web.

In chapter three, I described the Qur’ānic worldview of relationships between revelations as a series of concentric circles. Beginning with God as the Divine Center for all guidance and revelation, the circles progressed outward through general signs of guidance on to the named revelations given to various prophets through the ages. From those named revelations the next circle included all of the terms and functions that those revelations played in drawing humanity back to God. The fourth circle identified a few correlated words that could be studied in greater detail in the future, but were noteworthy in this study as well, as they reveal certain activities connected with the believer’s response to revelation. Finally, at both a point of beginning for each person’s choice to respond to revelation (as the thread pulling him back to God), and even the eschatological endpoint describing their choice; the fifth circle collected the various words associated with either belief in the books or spurning them. All of that discussion was followed by a graphic representation of the full web.

In chapter four the web begins to display its true intricacy and coherence. In answer to the three questions embedded in this quest regarding the Qur’ānic view of the previous revelations, it deals with origin and purpose; questions of hierarchy and uniqueness; a discussion of the charge of distortion; the presentation of the cycle of validation and prophecy within the revelations themselves; and finally, a short consideration of the hermeneutical cycle suggesting a connecting epistemological role for all of the revelations.
Throughout the study, based upon consistent Qur’ānic evidence and analysis, I have shown that the revelations (all of them) stand as integral parts of God’s guidance given to humanity to call them back to Himself. This worldview includes the revelations having their beginning in God, protection by God, and the same words of praise and function being attributed to them within the Divine plan. Not only are they considered a part of God’s historic activity in the world, but true believers (both defined within the time of the revelation of the Qur’ān and those of faith throughout time) are those who believe in all of the revelations and therefore obey. Not only is the aspect of belief in the revelations intact in the great lists of the faithful, but as one considers the internal descriptions of the roles that the revelations play in the life of the believer, two additional cycles come to light. The first one connects all of the revelations into a tight bidirectional process of validating and prophesying. The next cycle establishes the role of the revelations being studied together in order to lead the believer into the clearest understanding of God’s guidance.

Given the whole picture of the conceptual web, the overwhelming message is that people of faith will believe in all of the revelations and use them to determine direction for their lives in response to the guidance that God has given them within those revelations. I show that in the Qur’ān God gives both warnings are given to those who only accept a part of the message as well as promises to believers that He will protect His words. Therefore, I refute the traditional interpretation that previous revelations have become corrupted (the interpretation which thereby limits valid revelation today to the Qur’ān). Similarly, I argue that such an erroneous interpretation necessarily invalidates both the whole coherence of the Qur’ānic
worldview as well as God’s own promises of protection and thereby brings into question the validity of all of the revelations including the Qur‘ān. In light of this study, then, I agree with the other authors (Ayoub and Saeed quoted previously) that the current Islamic view of the corruption of previous scriptures needs to be seriously reassessed.

**Implications for Further Study**

This research has direct implications for further study in at least three tightly interrelated areas. I shall list them here as individual subjects, although the discussion of them blurs the lines of distinction. The first area on which this study sheds light concerns the discussion (often a polemic one) about the significance of the Bible for the Muslim, which immediately raises other issues of theology, religious practice, law, and socio-political organization. The second is about the historic rise of the theory of *tahrīf* and why the belief that the Bible today is a corrupt version of what it was originally has become the de-facto view of so many Muslims today. The third area involves the ongoing need for interfaith dialog and the role that the revelations play there. After a short discussion about these complicated subjects I will offer some final words of hope in light of this study.

Although this thesis from the outset was not focused on determining whether or not one can assume that the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel mentioned in the Qur‘ān are the very books that exist today;\(^\text{154}\) based on this study and the integrity of the

\(^{154}\) Some have considered that to be the case. Sidney H. Griffith shares in the entry, Gospel, of the Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān, “There is some evidence that the term Gospel was also sometimes used in the early Islamic period to indicate the whole New Testament, in the same way that the name Torah was used.
conceptual web, a few questions are raised that impact this discourse directly. First of all, if those books which were “in their hands,” having a tangible presence, sent by God, protected by God, and used to validate the message of the Qur’ān at that time; are no longer the ones “in their hands” now; then in light of the web, there are serious implications. Since the same promises for the protection of God’s words are attributed to the Qur’ān as well, any assumption of corruption on the other books calls into question God’s protective ability and promise for all of the books. In addition to calling into question God’s protection of all revelation, the assumption of corruption of the previous revelations also brings into question the timelessness of the message of the Qur’ān (or any revelation). Given the revered role of the Qur’ān, specifically within Muslim thinking (though that same reverence would apply to all revelations as I have already shown), the two interrelated cycles of validation and hermeneutics existing within the Qur’ānic worldview would invariably be broken as well by the claim of corruption. In other words, if the Qur’ān cannot be validated by the previous revelations then the credibility of Muḥammad as prophet is weakened since part of the basis of his authenticity was in bringing the same message that the previous prophets and revelations did. Within the hermeneutic cycle, the eternal validity of all revelations is also challenged by the belief that God would not send believers knowingly to a book that is going to be corrupted (which was not corrupted then) or lost thereby breaking both His promise and His guidance? The mere mention of such potential possibilities is unacceptable within the overall Qur’ānic worldview and

not only for the Pentateuch, but for all the books of the Jewish scriptures.” He goes on to say some early Muslim writers who quoted from scriptures include Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and al-Ya’qubi (d. 292/905). Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān (Leiden: Boston : Brill, 2001).
therefore needs serious thought in connection with this issue. Unfortunately, the prevalence of these views in the polemical discussions through the centuries have offered much more heat than light, and it is hoped that a study like this will establish some foundational logic to begin a more fruitful dialog!

The same needs to be said in the area of textual criticism, which is often pounced upon by polemicists as a major source of quotes and variant views (for either side). From the Qur’ānic perspective, the ultimate cause for belief in any revelation is that it leads back to God, not to human evidence of protection or even to perceptions of error! Although current scientific views may not always seem to fit the understood picture of faith, faith is not the handmaiden of science. God may speak in scientific ways so that humanity can appreciate His message, but He is not limited by created beings’ scientific constructs of understanding. God and faith are larger than that. The understanding of revelation as God’s giving of guidance to humanity needs to be understood appropriately as well within this paradox. Add to that reality the fact that academic opinions do not in and of themselves constitute objective truth and often change with incredible rapidity in light of eternity; one needs to constantly reassess the various textual critics and their opinions at any given time in the light of faith and God’s power to protect His words. In having said this, however, perceptions of

\[155\] Harald Motzki has said that beginning with something that is universally accepted “is surely not a very secure starting point: unanimity on a scholarly issue is a temporary phenomenon.” Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur’ān. A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam*(Berlin) 78, no. 1 (2001), 1-34.
revelation and inspiration may need to be adjusted in order to find some common ground.  

Regarding the issue of *tahriif*, more study is needed to ascertain the exact rise of the arguments and motivation in light of how it cannot be sustained within a purely Qur’ānic worldview or even within from the perspective of some of the early authors of *tafsīrs*. Taking into account what Ayoub and Saeed have said, I feel confident that this work will add to the serious need for scholars to reassess this issue and find a more coherent understanding of the Qur’ān’s relationship to the other revelations. My initial research seems to point to the historic literary interaction between Ibn Ḫazm (456/1064) and Ibn Nagrella (448/1056) as being the seminal example of many of the *tahriif* arguments coming to the forefront in Islam (and repeated for centuries thereafter). D. Powers investigates this further in his interesting article, “Reading/Misreading One Another’s Scriptures: Ibn Ḫazm’s Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahūdī.” Without going too deeply into this subject, let me share a few of his conclusions as they directly impact the point of what is being presented in this study.

First of all, Powers found that Ibn Ḫazm and Ibn Nagrella’s discourses were far from objective analyses. “Both Ibn Ḫazm and Ibn Nagrella are religious polemicists, not disinterested scholars, and even a cursory examination of their arguments reveals the application of a double standard; what is acceptable within one’s own religious tradition is not acceptable within another.” Then, the more he studied their

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156 Zebiri shares the following comment in the entry Polemic, from the Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān that fits with what I have been saying: “Contemporary Muslim polemic tends to draw more on sources external to the Qur’ān, in particular higher biblical criticism which can be used to demonstrate that the Bible is not "revealed" in the sense that Muslims generally understand revelation, i.e. the verbatim word of God (q.v.) preserved without any alterations.” McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*.
interaction, Powers came to the conclusion that it was likely that neither one had taken the time to read the holy book of the other. “The more familiar I have become with their respective arguments, the less convinced I am that either one actually sat down and read the other’s scripture.” In other words, they merely were parroting the previous attacks offered to them from writers within the opposing tradition or from outside. At no point was this a sincere effort to find mutual direction from the books that God has given!

Powers’ cogent conclusion resounds yet another note to the chorus of voices affirming the need for a more integrative and inclusive view of both the Qur’ān and the other revelations:

Our examination of the interchange between Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Nagrella provides us with an example of one way to read a sacred text, namely, with the intent of undermining the claim of the Hebrew Bible or the Qur’ān to be a scripture. It is to be hoped, however, that today, when increasing numbers of Jews and Muslims have access to the other’s scripture, either in the original language or in translation, and when the need for mutual understanding is so great, that the adherents of these two major religions will begin to read one another’s sacred text from a non-polemical perspective.

In light of the conceptual web of the Qur’ān, as seen within this study, the person of faith would be bound to do exactly as Powers suggests and try to find an uplifting understanding of each other’s books instead of creating more wars (whether of words or otherwise).


158 For a useful handbook on the various views of Muslims and Christians and the role of polemics see Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*, 258.

It is recognized that the mere thought of connecting the Bible to the Qur'ān into a common epistemological stance seems to conjure up immediate impossibilities based upon centuries of interaction, polemic, theology, wars, and so forth. However, it may not be as farfetched in the current era, where people of faith and heart are searching for the common message and hope needed to walk forward peacefully.\(^{160}\)

First of all, if one accepts both a timelessness and a timeliness for the various revelations (reading scripture with reference to the historic context – which is being more acknowledged by Muslim thinkers recently in regards to the Qur'ān)\(^{160}\) the gap may not actually be as intractable as some believe; even in regards to the more challenging issues related to Jesus and Muhammad. Authors such as Ayoub\(^{161}\) and Rahman discuss issues of Christology in a way that would warm many a Christian heart as a great beginning for further conversation. One such quote from Rahman says it this way:

The Qur'ān would most probably have no objections to the Logos having become flesh if the Logos were not simply identified with God and the identification were understood less literally. For the Qur'ān, the Word of


\(^{162}\) Ayoub has written many excellent articles relating to Christology, Jesus Christ, and interfaith dialog. See T. Shi’ism, "Select Bibliography of the Works of Mahmoud M. Ayoub (Compiled September 2003)," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, no. 1 (2004), 163-166.
God is never identified simply with God. Jesus, again, is the “Spirit of God” in a special sense for the Qur’ān, although God had breathed His spirit into Adam as well (Q 15:29; 38:72). It was on the basis of some such expectations from the self-proclaimed monotheism of Christians – and, of course, Jews – that the Qur’ān issued its invitation: “O People of the Book! Let us come together upon a formula which is common between us – that we shall not serve anyone but God, that we shall associate none with Him” (Q 3:64). This invitation, probably issued at a time when Muhammad thought not all was yet lost among the three self-proclaimed monotheistic communities, must have appeared specious to Christians. It has remained unheeded. But I believe something can still be worked by way of positive cooperation, provided the Muslims hearken more to the Qur’ān than to the historic formulations of Islam and provided that recent pioneering efforts continue to yield a Christian doctrine more compatible with universal monotheism and egalitarianism.\footnote{Rahman, \textit{Major Themes of the Qur’an}, 170.}

Note that Rahman identifies the need for Muslims to anchor the discussion in the Qur’ān and not Islamic doctrines; just as Christians should focus on a holistic view of God from the Bible and not on creeds.

Another challenging area is in regards to prophecies pointing to Muḥammad and his role in history. The apparent denial of these by Jews and Christians and the ensuing challenge for Muslims to find them clearly marked within scripture is one of the major reasons for the charge of the previous revelations being corrupted. Yet, if it could be shown that there have been Biblical perceptions and prophecies allowing for the legitimacy of both the line of Ishmael and Muḥammad’s coming this would necessarily remove that obstacle as well.\footnote{Regarding the legitimacy of the line of Ishmael, see Tony Maalouf, \textit{Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God’s Prophetic Plan for Ishmael’s Line} (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 367.; Regarding a prophetic understanding of Muḥammad see Stephen Dickie, \textit{Islam: God’s Forgotten Blessing} (Kasson, Minn: Strawberry Meadows Association, 2006), 140. Both of these books are from the perspective of Christians reassessing various parts of scripture to allow for a more inclusive reading of Muslims and Muḥammad. They are also written within the theme of witness and mission. But, the fact}
In closing, the single, most important need for true interfaith dialog based upon a core epistemology like the one described in this study is that it will challenge the debilitating pre-judgments of exclusivity to truth (claimed by both Muslim and Christians alike). By creating a potential modern epistemology for people of faith that includes a non-atomistic reading of all of the revelations, and acknowledges God’s guidance throughout time, exclusivism could be replaced by both individual humility and human community seeking God’s heart and guidance in the challenging days ahead of forging a peaceful coexistence in the world community. As the attention is lifted from human statements of truth towards God’s words of truth delivered throughout time to various prophets, it invariably lifts our eyes from our systems to the God of all truth. This kind of cooperation needs to be seriously considered, especially at this time in earth’s history, as D. Pratt remarks:

Arguably, so many of the clashes, confusions, and violent hotspots that exist today – where, for example, “Western Judeo-Christian” interfaces with “Islamic” cultures and societies (and here we only need to think of Iraq, or Afghanistan, or the Balkans) – are born from the legacy of unexamined conflicting religious ideologies and unresolved mutual misunderstanding and confused thinking. This is where the theological dimension of interreligious dialogue, particularly between Christian and Muslim, but also in respect to Jewish-Muslim engagement, must not be set aside. It needs instead urgent advance.

remains that “new” understandings of the Bible are opening more Christians up to a more positive view of Islam. For a comprehensive summary of Christian voices regarding the Qur’an, see Ford, Jr, F Peter, “The Qur’an as Sacred Scripture: An Assessment of Contemporary Christian Perspectives,” The Muslim World (Hartford) 83, no. 2 (1993), 142-164.

165 Zebiri, Muslims and Christians Face to Face, 175.
In light of such a statement, I believe the conceptual web offers an excellent beginning point for further research, which is urgently needed from all sides.  

Yet, I also realize that more than research maybe needed.  It may need a special group of people willing to go outside of the historic labels.  The Qur’ān may be alluding to them here in al-‘Ankabūt 29:46-47:

وَلاَ نُجَادُلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إلَّا بَالَّيْنِى هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَّلُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا أمَّا بَالَّيْنِى أَنْزلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأَنْزلَ الْيَلِيمَ وَالْهَيْكَمِ وَالْيَلِيمَ وَالْهَيْكَمِ وَأَحْدُ وَآخَرُ هَيْكَمُ لَهُ مُصِلِّمُونَ

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, “We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).”

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ فَالَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الكِتَابَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَمِنْ هُؤُلَاءِ مِنْ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِيَابِينَّا إِلَّا الْكَافِرُونَ

And thus (it is) that We have sent down the Book to thee. So the People of the Book believe therein, as also do some of these (pagan Arabs): and none but Unbelievers reject our signs.

Given the implications of this study the conceptual web describes a possible epistemology based upon all of the revealed scriptures of God.

Interestingly enough, when Prophet Muḥammad was escaping to Medina (1/622), in what became the beginning of the Islamic calendar, he and his companion Abu Bakr were saved through a number of miracles, one of which being the spider’s

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167 Recent scholarship by Walid Saleh regarding the writings of Al-Biqā‘ī (885/1480) display the very possibility of such an epistemology within the Islamic history of tafsīr. Consider the following quote from his forthcoming article entitled: “Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqai’s Qur’an Commentary,” in Festschrift for Joel Kramer, ed. Tzvi Langermann. Saleh writes, “Al-Biqā‘ī deployed the Bible not only for polemical or apologetic purposes, the two uses to which the Muslims customarily put the Bible, but primarily as scripture to elucidate scripture. His underlying assumption was that the Bible has something to teach the Muslims.” Saleh has also written another article (under review by Speculum) called “A Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqai’s Bible Treatise and His Defence of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur’an,” that further presents the reasons for such an epistemology. Both of these works in particular and the ensuing research that will follow from studying al-Biqā‘ī’s works and reasons add further impetus to the understanding of the Conceptual Web that I have put forth in this study.
web covering the mouth of the cave. It may very well be that in these days it will be another web that gives guidance and protection for those choosing to walk the way of faith: using all of the revelations within the conceptual web as was just described from the chapter of the Spider (al-‘Ankabūt)!
APPENDIX

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