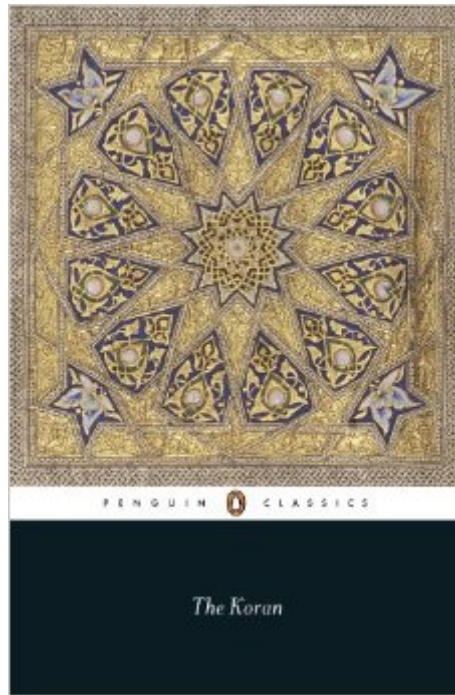


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The Koran (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

N. J. Dawood's masterful translation of The Koran is in a fully revised edition. The Koran is universally accepted by Muslims to be the infallible word of God as first revealed to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel nearly fourteen hundred years ago. Its 114 chapters recount the narratives and rules of conduct central to Islamic belief, and together they form one of the world's most influential prophetic works and a literary masterpiece in its own right. This newly revised edition of N. J. Dawood's classic translation is also available in a larger edition with the original Arabic in parallel text. For more than sixty-five years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,500 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I had no real interest in Islam until 9/11, after which I picked up and read Islam: The Straight Path by John Esposito. I then did an independent study of Sufism, which is what sparked my interest in Islam enough to read The Koran, its central text. Although I cannot comment on the other reviewers' differing views on the accuracy of this translation, I can write that this translation does convey something of the thunderous power that Muhammad's earliest listeners must have heard and experienced when these suras (speeches - the Koran is a collection of 114 speeches given by

Muhammad, which Muslims believe were revelations given to him by God) were first delivered. There are a number of things that one could mention content-wise, as each sura deals with something slightly different. God, women, human relationships, one's relationship to the non-believing world, Judaism, Christianity, and Arabic paganism are all touched upon in the Koran (along with other topics). It reads much like the Bible at points, and many of the more familiar Biblical stories are here, along with extra-Biblical legends. The Koran really isn't a bizarre religious text, but very much belongs to the genealogy of monotheistic, prophetic writings. One of the things that I really liked about this particular translation was the way that Dawood cross-referenced relevant Biblical texts from both the Tanak/Old Testament and the New Testament. The footnotes detailing Arabic pagan practice were also helpful, as were the footnotes giving basic historical information. One certainly gets a feel for where the Koran was coming from and who it was going to when it was first delivered. In reading this, it is worth reflecting on how a passage can lend itself to multiple interpretations.

When I decided to read the Koran, I studied the various translations available, trying to find the most readable, reliable version available. I downloaded all available public domain translations from gutenberg.org and carefully compared them against the translations currently available in print. I bought several, but not all, the translations, and settled upon this translation to read. I chose this translation because it was one of the most readable and because of my long experience of the reliability of Penguin translations. As one who knows next to nothing about Islam, I was struck by three things: The moral teachings; the martial teachings; and the figure of Jesus. First the moral teachings: They are quite similar to the moral teachings of the Christian Bible. Indeed, the Koran explicitly recognizes the scriptural nature of the "Torah" and the "Gospel." The moral teachings don't seem to be as plentiful in the Koran as in the New Testament, but I think there's a very good explanation. Mohammed was at war most of his prophetic career, therefore quite a lot of the Koran deals with warfare. Second, the martial teachings: They are quite prevalent, and one could easily read the martial teachings to the exclusion of all else in the Koran. Something that struck me about the martial teachings was that they stressed non-aggression. The good believer is to fight only in self defense, and only enough to accomplish the defense. After defeating the enemy, then the good believer must be forgiving and merciful. Martial teachings prevail in number over moral teachings in the Koran because Mohammed was persecuted in his lifetime, driven out of Mecca, attacked in Medina, and forced to defend himself in a bloody war.

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