

Use of Genesis 1–3 in Bible Study with Muslims

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We have mentioned several times in *Seedbed* the importance of Genesis 1–3 as the starting point for communication of the story of redemption. A narrative study prepared in Tunisia primarily for illiterates is available upon request to *Seedbed*. The following is a study on the same passage, developed on a different level for inductive study with literates.

These first three chapters of the Bible contain the seedbed of all biblical truth. They lay the foundation for understanding the character of God, the purpose of creation, the nature of man, sin and its consequences, the need of redemption and the way God has provided for this need. Failure to present this section of the Bible effectively will have serious implications for adequate understanding of the whole. What it emphasizes and how it is handled is, therefore, of supreme importance.

Doctrines Revealed, Explicitly Or Implicitly

1. *Concerning God*

His eternal self-existence, creatorship, omnipotence, sovereignty, wisdom, goodness, mercy, self-revelation, personal nature, transcendence, immanence, quality of redeemer/savior.

2. *Concerning man*

He was created as a distinct species rather than evolved from lower species, created with both physical and spiritual qualities, created with the ability to communicate with his

Creator, created free from defect or sin, created a rational being, created a moral being, created as God's vicegerent to the rest of creation. - He is a fallen creature in present state as a consequence of disobedience, rendering him spiritually dead and incapable of achieving his own redemption.

3. *Concerning Satan*

He is a created being, a rational being, the enemy of God and man, seeking to thwart the purposes of God and the destiny of man, operating by craftiness and deceit, destined to final destruction.

4. *Concerning sin*

Sin is disobedience to the revealed will of God, entered into by deliberate choice, abetted by Satan's deception, alienating man from God, calling forth the judgment of God, infecting the entire human race, resulting in death (first spiritual, then physical).

5. *Concerning redemption*

It is at God's initiative, involving both the coming of a redeemer and the means of a vicarious substitute.

Common Muslim/Christian Understandings Existent in the Narrative

The eternal existence of God—1:1

God as unique Creator—1:1

The omnipotent word of God—"God said ..." reiterated throughout chapters 1, 2

Creation of Adam from dust—2:7

Perfection of original creation—1:31
 “very good”

The interdiction given as to partaking of the tree—2:17

The broad outlines of Adam’s sin—ch. 3,
 i.e. Satan’s character and role, Eve’s initiative, Adam’s compliance, God’s judgment of expulsion from the garden

Unknown or Unrecognised Factors to Emphasize

1. In the creation

- The logically orderly progression from simple to complex, each act preparing for the succeeding act, i.e. light as basic to all the rest of creation, dry land as basic to vegetation, vegetation as basic to animal life.
- Creation according to defined and closed species (many of today’s Muslims will have, consciously or unconsciously, imbibed the theory of evolution from the western-model education in which they have been trained).
- The uniqueness of God’s creation of man
 - Contrast in language = “let the land produce...” vs. “let us make...”
 - Dual action of 2:7 = “...dust of the ground...” (physical nature, giving affinity with the rest of creation), “breath of life” (spiritual nature, giving affinity with God)
 - Definition of “...in the image of God...” as imparting dominion over the rest of creation (1:26,27), moral responsibility (2:17) and spirit nature, i.e. capacity to know and relate personally with God

2. In the Fall

— Tactics used by Satan

- suggestion/insinuation = “Did God really say ... any tree ...?”
- denial/lying = “You will not die ...”
- deceit/false promise = “... eyes will be opened ... become like God”
- impugning the character of God = “God knows ...”
- promise of something better than God had given = “You shall become as Gods”

— Steps in act of disobedience

- giving attention = Eve answered Satan, rather than ignoring him
- altering God’s word = “You must not touch it.”
- looking at the forbidden = “When the woman saw ...”
- lusting after the forbidden = “... good for food ... pleasing to the eye ...”
- taking the forbidden = “... she took some ...”
- ingesting the forbidden = “... and ate it”
- involving another in partaking of the forbidden = “She also gave some to her husband ...”

— The definition of sin

- disobedience to God’s revealed will
- turning from God to Satan
- seeking to improve on what God has declared perfect
- self-dependence, rather than God-dependence

— The consequences of sin

- frustration = their eyes were

opened, they saw only their nakedness

- * shame = effect of nakedness, implied by ensuing action, 3:7
 - * fear = v.10
 - * alienation from God = 8, 10
 - * self-justification, i.e. shifting the blame to others
 - * divine judgment upon the serpent, upon Eve, upon Adam
 - * spiritual death for Adam and Eve personally (cf. 3:19 w/2:17 & 2:7) and for the race of mankind descended from them (5:1-3)
- The futility of man's efforts to compensate for his sin and make himself acceptable to God.
- * Adam's statement, "I was naked", when garbed in the clothes of their own making

3. *In God's redemptive actions*

- Taking the initiative to seek out Adam-3:9
- Promise of a deliverer-3:15
- Providing a covering for sin-3:21

The above points are outlined as guideline helps for the study leader. He/she should keep in mind, however, that these truths are imparted implicitly through animated narration or inductive dialogue rather than explicitly through enumeration of doctrinal points.

Presentation

Keep constantly in mind that this is an introduction to the Bible story of redemption. One should not expect or attempt to try to explain and apply all the truths implied in the narrative. Much will be left as foundational

mystery which will be explained later. For instance, I would make no reference to 3:15 being a prediction of Jesus Christ at this point, or of the coats of skin being typical of His redemptive sacrifice. It would be better at this point to leave the specific application vague, i.e. 3:15 being a prediction that someday a descendant of Eve would destroy the Serpent and that the coats of skin typify redemption by sacrifice. Chronological study allows understanding of biblical revelation to develop progressively, even as that revelation was given progressively. We must studiously avoid a western tendency to explain and apply everything immediately from the first lesson.

This passage can be used effectively in either narrative or discussion study modes. Narration would be most effective for illiterates or larger groups. Inductive discussion will be most effective for literates, especially one-on-one or with small groups. I have most commonly used it in the latter form. In this mode the narrative is developed through leading questions to which the interlocutor finds the answers by reading and reflecting on the passage. He should be led by question/discussion to draw his own conclusions, rather than the leader of the discussion imposing his. I include a tentative list of questions below. Remember, however, that the study should be living, with questions and sub-questions formed and rephrased to enable the participants to grasp the meaning of the text in the context of the dialogue. Therefore, use the questions as a general guide, not as a canned formula.

Study Guide Questions

Chapter One

1. When did God begin? (1:1)
2. What is His first action recorded for us? (1:1)
3. What agent(s) did He use in creation? (1:2, 3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26)
4. In what order were the elements of the earth created? (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)
5. What significance do you see in the order of creation?
6. What repeated phrase in 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25 indicates how the different species of plant and animal life came to be?
7. What was God's evaluation of His work at the end of each day (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and of all the completed work at the end of creation? (1:31)
8. What does the phrase "very good", pronounced by God, indicate as to the original state of His creation?
9. Is the created universe as we find it today still in that original state?

Chapter Two

1. Why did God rest on the seventh day? (2:1-3)
2. How does this reinforce what we saw in chapter one as to the original state of Creation?
3. Chapter one gives a brief story of all of creation, including man. Chapter 2:4-25 seems to review the material. On what or on whom do the details of chapter 2 concentrate? (2:5, 7, 15-25)
4. From what was man's physical being made? (2:7)

5. What action imparted life to this being? (2:7)
6. How does this differ from the creation of plants and the rest of animal life? (compare 2:7 with 1:11, 20, 24)
7. What provision did God make for man's living environment and sustenance? (2:8, 9, 16, 17)
8. What single restriction did God place on man's consumption of what God had provided? (2:17)
9. What was the judgment promised if this restriction was not observed?
10. What responsibility did God give to man in the environment in which He placed Him? (2:15) What does this teach us as to our responsibility for the environment in which we live?
11. What provision did God make for man's social need? (2:18, 21-23)
12. Why was the formation of a new creature necessary to meet this need? (2:21)
13. From what was woman made? (2:21, 22)
14. What was to be her position and role alongside man? (2:20-22)
15. What does 2:25 indicate concerning the relationship between the first human pair and between them and God?

Chapter Three

1. What do we learn about "the serpent" in 3:1-5?
2. What steps did he take to get the woman to eat of the forbidden tree?

3. What does his action indicate as to his attitude, both toward God and toward mankind?
4. What progressive steps do you see in the woman's response to the temptation?
5. Was the serpent's promise of v.5 realized when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit in v. 7? How did the reality differ from the promise?
6. How did they respond to the new awareness that their disobedience to God's command gave them?
7. How did their sin affect their attitude toward and relationship with God?
8. What does the man's response to God's question in v. 10 indicate as to the worth of what they had done in v. 7?
9. Were either of the pair ready to accept his/her responsibility for what they had done? How did they seek to evade their own responsibility?
10. What judgment did God pronounce on the serpent?
11. What judgment did He pronounce on the woman?
12. What judgment did He pronounce on the man?
13. Carefully compare 3:17-19 with 2:17. What apparent contradiction do you find?
14. What kind of life is referred to in 3:19?
15. What aspect of man's originally created life was missing at this time? What had happened to this aspect of his life?
16. What evidences of God's mercy do you see, in spite of their disobedience?
17. Comparing v. 21 with v. 7, what can we conclude as to the only initiator and provider of a covering for the result of sin?
18. From what did God make clothing for them? What had to happen for these clothes to be made? What does this indicate as to the price to be paid for covering of sin?
19. Why do you think God banished the pair from Eden? Was this a banishment from heaven to earth, or an expulsion from a perfect earthly environment?

I then turn to Gen. 5:1-3 and contrast the phrases "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God," and "Adam ... had a son in his own image ..." I ask what had happened in the interval between the realization of these two statements, emphasizing that what Adam reaped as the consequences of his sin was passed on to succeeding generations of mankind.