

Adam and Eve

Do you know anyone named Adam or Adama? Do you know any women who are called Eve or Awa? You probably know that these are the names of the first man and the first woman, but do you know what the Bible says about this first couple? The story is rather well known. In fact, several aspects of the story are practically the same in the Bible on the one hand and the Qur'an and Muslim tradition on the other. The Bible does not treat this story as a myth or a parable, and we need to take it seriously. It shows us why we all, regardless of our ethnic origin or nationality, are brothers, having come from the same father (Acts 17:26). It shows us the great value of human life, the sanctity of the union of a man and woman in marriage, the nature of temptation and the consequences of sin. We won't have time to explore all these matters in depth, but we will point out some important ideas relating to them.

GOD CREATED MAN AND WOMAN

After dealing with the creation of everything else, the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, gives us the following details about the creation of man:

“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed... [He] put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’ Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:7,15-18,21-25)

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

An important difference between the Bible story and that of the Qur'an is found in Genesis 1:26,27. Before creating human beings, God said, “‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” It is important to understand the meaning of these words. The Christian does not take this expression, “created in the image of God,” as an indication that God and man resemble each other physically. Jesus tells us in John 4:24 that “God is spirit,” and he specifies in Luke 24:39, “A spirit does not have flesh and bones.”

God is not limited to a physical body like ours; He is everywhere at the same time. He says in Jeremiah 23:24, “‘Can a man hide himself in secret places where I cannot see him?’—the Lord’s declaration. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’—the Lord’s declaration.” So what does this phrase mean: “God created man in His own image”?

Unlike animals, man was created in the image of God—intellectually so that there might be a communion of thoughts between himself and God; emotionally so that there might be a sharing of feelings between man and his Creator; and morally so that he might have the ability to evaluate whether conduct is good or bad, as God does. Man is the image of God in that he has a will, the ability to choose, and in that he is rules over the part of creation that is lower than himself.

The idea that man is created in God’s image does not diminish at all the infinite greatness of God. We are far from putting God on the same level with man—this would be blasphemy. But this idea, this biblical truth, does a lot to exalt man in comparison to God’s other creatures, and it gives a special value to human life. This means that to take a human life is an act deserving of the death penalty because of this dignity that God gave man at creation. Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.”

THE FIRST SIN

But let’s return to the case of Adam and Eve. We

don't know how much time the man and woman lived in peace in the garden, but the Bible and the Qur'an agree on the fact that one day the Devil, rebel against God and enemy of man, came to set a trap. In the biblical version, the devil appears as a snake when he speaks to the woman:

“Did God really say, “You can't eat from any tree in the garden?” The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, “You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.”’ ‘No! You will not die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Genesis 3:1-7)

Before continuing, let's quickly respond to a false idea about the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the forbidden fruit. Some teach that the fruit represents sexual relations. The Bible does not breathe a word of this idea. On the contrary, according to Genesis 1:28, God blessed the man and woman after creating them and said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” How could they fulfill the will of God in this regard if at the same time God forbade them from having sexual relations? No, sexuality in the framework of marriage was not at all impure or unhealthy. The Bible does not identify this story as being a parable. So let's take it as it is presented in the word of God—the simple story of disobedience to a simple and direct commandment given by God to the first couple.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve had very serious consequences. In the last verse that we read, we have the impression that instead of being delighted by the effect of having eaten the fruit, they felt a certain shame which they had not experienced previously. They took leaves to cover their nudity. The idea of shame is reinforced in the following verse: “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the

evening breeze, and they hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). At this point, there is another divergence between the biblical account and that of the Qur'an. In the Bible, the consequences of the sin are rather vast—not as much as some theologians have claimed, but all the same very serious. Here is the rest of the story:

“So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard You in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.’ Then He asked, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ Then the man replied, ‘The woman You gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.’ So the Lord God asked the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘It was the serpent. He deceived me, and I ate.’” (Genesis 3:9-13)

(Let us point out, in passing, that we are a lot like Adam and Eve, because, like them, we often prefer to blame other people for the sins that we commit instead of accepting responsibility for our own choices. Adam and Eve both knew the commandment that God had given them about the forbidden tree.)

After hearing them, God pronounced sanctions against the serpent that Satan had used, against Satan himself, against the woman and the man. Among the consequences for the woman would be suffering during pregnancy and at the time of childbirth, and a more accentuated submission to her husband. The consequences for the man included the fact that work would become more difficult because the earth would more easily produce thorns and weeds than the plants that are useful to man. But the most serious consequence of the disobedience of the man and woman is the one about which God had warned them: death.

CONSEQUENCES OR JUDGEMENT?

Before going further, let's make an important distinction between bearing the consequences of an act and being judged guilty of an act. According to Islam, God does not punish anyone for the faults of others. This same principle is taught in the Bible. For example Ezekiel 18:20 says, “The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the

wickedness of the wicked person will be on him.” And Romans 14:12 says, “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

Such biblical passages refute the doctrine of original sin which says that every human being is born into the world already defiled by Adam’s sin, having inherited the guilt of the sin of his first parents and an already corrupted nature. Actually a newborn comes into the world pure and innocent in the eyes of God—it has done nothing good or evil and is not yet capable of making conscious decisions. This is not to say the child cannot suffer in this life because of the actions of those who preceded it. Suppose that his grandfather had a very large fortune, but his father was given to alcohol, drugs, games of chance and other vices, and wasted the fortune so that the child was born into extreme poverty. The child will suffer by his father’s fault, but the child is not considered guilty of his father’s crimes. Another child could be born with sexually transmitted diseases because his mother had led a life of sexual immorality. The child suffers the painful consequences of the sin of his parent but the child does not bear her iniquity before God.

DEATH—THE WAGE OF SIN

When we speak of the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve, the most serious was without doubt the death of which God had spoken to them. Actually there are two types of death involved. First, we think of physical death. Certainly Adam and Eve did not die physically the same day that they ate the forbidden fruit, but mortality went to work in their bodies. In the Garden of Eden, man had access to the tree of life. After his sin, God said:

“Since man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:22-24)

This is why the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

But there is another kind of death that struck

Adam and his wife on the day they sinned: spiritual death, which is condemnation and separation from God. Banished from the Garden, they lost the communion they had enjoyed up to that point with their Creator. This death, which is much more serious than physical death, is not transmitted from father to son. One doesn’t inherit it. It is a result of our own actions. This is why Paul wrote to Christians in Ephesians 2:1,2, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked...” We can’t accuse Adam for our state of spiritual death. No, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

THE HOPE OF THE FALLEN MAN

Glory to God, who did not abandon man after this first sin. Instead, even before creating the world, God knew how he was going to solve the problem of man’s sin. The solution is Jesus Christ. Paul said in Romans 5:17, “Since by the one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Salvation is offered to every human being.