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The View of Women in The Bible and the Koran through the eyes of a Woman

In modern times two religions have taken a dominant seat in the lives of many people. Islam and Christianity play a large part in today’s culture, particularly in the lives of women and their predicament between following faith and being an independent member of society. Both of these religious texts comment on women and their place, especially in comparison to their male counterparts. The Bible talks about women and their duty to their husbands. The Koran also talks about the woman, but the passages are clearly written for the man of the household. Both texts appear to have similar ideologies about women and their place in society, but are laid out in different ways.

A major topic relating to women in both the Bible and the Koran is the treatment of women in relation to their husbands. I find it interesting that there is an entire section of the Koran that is written specifically for women whereas in the Bible them messages as spread out by their date. Also, the section written for women in the Koran addresses the husband, not the wife. It tells the husband about the rules for the marriage gift he has to give his wife, and rules about taking that from her and how much he can take. At no point does the intended audience shift to the woman in the situation. In the “sūrat An-nisā’ (The Women) IV number 4” in The Noble Koran it says, “And give to the women …their Mahr …with a good heart; but if they of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it, and enjoy it without fear of any harm.” (Hilālī Taqī al-Dīn, 111). This clearly shows that the woman is being ignored even though this section is supposed to be referring to her. It seems to be more about how her husband can get his money back from her after they are married. While the Koran appears to be talking directly to the man in the women section it still affords the woman in the situation some independence because she has to willingly give the money to her husband in order for him to take it. In the Bible the husband and wife have a completely different dynamic. In the New Oxford Annotated Bible, Ephesians 5:22-23 the Bible says, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church and his body and is himself the savior.” (May, Herbert G., and Bruce Manning, 1421). This section is talking directly to wives about they should treat and respect their husbands. In this section it is directly saying that the husband is the head of the family. A few verses later the Bible directly addresses the men about how they are supposed to treat their wives in Ephesians 5:28, “Even so husbands should live their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (May, Herbert G., and Bruce Manning, 1421). This passage has a very different feel than the section addressing the man from the Koran because the Koran was talking about what material things you have to give your wife where the Bible is more concerned about how you should love her. It shows a completely different treatment of wives in these cultures. Both are subservient to the man, but one makes a point about the kind of love a man should have for his wife.

Another important story in both of these texts is the creation story. This is where God, or in the case of the Koran Allah, created the world and everything in it. He made man and from man he made woman. In Genesis 3:18 the Lord says, “I will make him a helper fit for him.” Then later in Genesis 3:22-23 the Bible says, “and the rib the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my flesh; she shall become woman because she was taken out of man.” (May, Herbert G., and Bruce Manning, 5). This clearly shows that man came first and that woman came from him. In Amina Wadud’s book, Qur’an and Women, she says, “The Qur’an does not consider women a type of man in its major themes. Man and woman are two categories of the human species given the same or equal potential.” (Wadud, 15). While I am not a theologist who has spent a large part of their life studying and picking apart each of these texts it does seem like Amina’s claims are a little off base. While the Koran does acknowledge them in a section it is only barely for them. That section is mostly about them and for their husbands and male relatives. The other part of the creation story that is very important is when Adam and Eve eat fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This was an act that God had strictly forbade, but the serpent, representing the devil, talked them into it. After they did this God punished them, but after looking at the punishments it seems that the women got the short end of that stick. In Barbara Freyer Stowasser’s books, Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation, she says, “In Sura 20 (the earliest account), God’s warning, Satan’s temptations, and God’s forgiveness are all directed at Adam even though both man and woman eat of the forbidden tree and are expelled from the Garden.” (Stowasser, 27). This is proven true when you look at the punishments listed in the Bible. In Genesis 3:16 it says, “To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you should bring forth children…” (May, Herbert G., and Bruce Manning, 5). For the man’s punishment it says, “cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life…” (May, Herbert G., and Bruce Manning, 5). These punishments seem incredibly unfair between the two groups. The women have childbirth pain, which I do not know from experience, but I hear is incredibly painful. So much so that most women are numbed from the waist down. Men on the other hand essentially made it that everyone will die at some point. To be fair at the time Jesus had not come yet, so this probably meant you would go to Hell when you died, but in the post Jesus time frame where as long as you accept Jesus Christ as your savior you go to heaven, this is hardly a punishment.

Both the Bible and the Koran are the key text for two of the world’s most popular religions, and they cover similar topics and even share a key story. They both take place in societies and times when women are seen as subservient to men or almost like they are their assistants. It is a different relationship than you will find in more modern times, but still relevant in many cultures around the globe. The texts had more in common than I had expected as far as attitude about women and their place in society.

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