TSC 107 Muslim-Christian Commentaries final

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**SPEAKERS**

Ida Glaser, David Capes

**Ida Glaser** 00:00

I'm Ida Glasser. I'm the director of the new center for Muslim Christian studies in Houston, and also the international Academic Coordinator for the Center for Muslim Christian studies in Oxford, of which I used to be academic director and then Director. I'm here today because I'm holding in my hands, an amazing book. It's called Genesis 1-11, but a theology, grandmother of the sciences, seedbed of the holy books. And I have had the huge privilege of co authoring this with Anwar al Assad. That's the very first commentary in a series of which I'm series editor.

**David Capes** 01:06

Dr. Glasser, it is so good to see you. Thanks for being with us on the stone chapel podcast, delighted to be with you. You've been here at the library for a couple of days, and you've been studying and hopefully, it's been a productive time for you. We'd love for you to come back and be with us for a longer period of time.

**Ida Glaser** 01:23

Yes, I've managed to pretty much complete a chapter on what is the gospel, reflecting in Islamic context.

**David Capes** 01:32

Now, you've been with us on a podcast before and we're gonna put in our show notes, kind of a link to that because you tell a good bit of your personal story with that. And you told us in that podcast, a bit about the Oxford center that you've directed, and now the Houston center. Let's talk specifically today about this commentary series. It's the new unique commentary series. There's nothing quite like it. So tell us a bit what what is this series about? Because we have lots of commentaries in the library. But this is a very unique approach to commentary writing. Tell us about it.

**Ida Glaser** 02:09

Okay, well, this is commentary from Muslim contexts. So as far as I know, there haven't been serious Bible commentaries that have tried to take a Muslim context into account. So since some that came out in Arabic in the 10th century, so that's like, 1000 years, okay. So you'll find, you'll find some of the Bible translators these days and one project in the Arabic speaking world that are trying to produce Bibles that have annotations in that is suitable for Muslims, but not full, serious Bible Commentary.

**David Capes** 02:49

This is a part of a bigger project that you're working with this book. Yeah.

**Ida Glaser** 02:53

So maybe if I can tell you how we came to do this. Yeah, that's great. So I myself had done my doctorate on reading Genesis 1 to 11, in an Islamic context. So putting it in conversation with the Quranic material, because there are parallel stories in the Quran. You get Quranic stories of Creation of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Noah.

**David Capes** 03:19

All the main players.

**Ida Glaser** 03:21

Yeah. And they play out into Islamic tradition as well. Did you know that Seth was a prophet in Islamic tradition?

**David Capes** 03:28

I don't think I've remember that. No.

**Ida Glaser** 03:31

So Muslims, and Muslim background, believers coming to Genesis 1 to 11, are going to have all that in their mind. And of course, the Qur'an functions like a commentary on the Bible in many ways. So it's like the Koran 's version, versions, plural of the Adam stories function like authoritative commentary on the Bible for Muslim readers. So Christians, reading alongside Muslims and Muslim background, believers have to take account of that, as they read the Bible. And as they teach it and preach it, just like if you're a New Testament scholar sitting here in the States, you probably have to say, take some account of the critical scholarship. And of the popular scholarship, you know, Bart Ehrman, and so on, whether you want to call him critical, popular or whatever, right? You're a bit of both your New Testament scholarship and teaching would be lacking if you took no account of that. Exactly. So similarly, in Islamic context, there's something really missing if you don't deliberately take account of your context. And of course, you are taking out of your context even if you don't think about it. Yeah. So I had this vision to produce some books, one on each book of the Bible, which would help people to think about how this scripture relates to Islamic teaching in Islamic context. And I asked her a very fine Lebanese scholar, if he would help develop this with me, this is Martin Icad, who's my co series editor. So we decided that what we needed to do was to get together, particularly some Muslim background believers from different countries, and to ask them what they needed. Every single one of them said, We need full Bible commentaries, because every verse and every word of the Bible is relevant to our contexts. And we need to read every word of it properly within our contexts. Besides which people have been telling us look, the Western commentaries simply don't fit us. So I was talking to a woman in Uzbekistan, Muslim background believer who has been searching for Bible commentaries to translate into into Uzbek. And she can't find any that fit her context. Her context is so near to the world of the Bible, but she doesn't want to have to drag her readers out into America or Britain or even into Russia. In order to understand the Bible.

**David Capes** 06:15

There needs to be a more direct link. Doesnt' there?

**Ida Glaser** 06:19

So we set these Muslim background believers. None of us knows how to write commentaries. Even the well known Old and New Testament scholars we had with us had not actually written commentaries. We said, if that's what you need, we'll try to do it. The problem is, as we approached a publisher, which is Langham, said, Well, this is a great idea. But can you find enough people to write these commentaries? And my answer was, that's the wrong question. Can we find any people to write these commentaries? And the answer is, maybe I could write one. But identifying even one person who would have the skills, the biblical skills, this the knowledge of the Islamic context, Quranic studies, embedded in a cultural context, and with the pastoral skill to write an appropriate commentary and the writing skills,

**David Capes** 07:20

Yes. Yeah, you're narrowing down.

**Ida Glaser** 07:24

Down to zero really.

**David Capes** 07:27

So what is the market for this? Is this going to be read by scholars primarily, is going to be for students who are studying in an Islamic context.

**Ida Glaser** 07:38

Well the idea is that each of the commentaries is going to have a very specific primary readership. So this first commentary, the primary readership, is the Muslim background believers in the theological college in which brother Anwar Al was teaching. Who was your co author? My, my co author? Yes. So the the writing team is him and me and his other teachers, and it's all been tested out on their students, and so on. And we've also had,

**David Capes** 08:14

so is that testing already taken place? Or is it taking place now?

**Ida Glaser** 08:17

Oh, it's well taken in place, because the original version is written in Bangla. And then it gets translated into what I call Bang-lish. And then I work with it and send it back. And so we've worked in the two languages. So it's developed in Bangla and in English at the same time, and, in fact, the very first draft of it. It was written on the basis of the questions that Anwar Al has been answering, as he's been teaching these Muslim background believers, Genesis 1 to 11, for a number of years.

**David Capes** 08:51

But Anwar, all during this process, something happened to him tell us a little bit about that.

**Ida Glaser** 08:56

He completed really the final script in Bangla. And he sent me his draft preface. And then he got COVID, and a massive stroke, and died just like that.

**David Capes** 09:10

That's quite a blow to you, and to his family and to the seminary.

**Ida Glaser** 09:17

And to the whole, the whole movement in Bangladesh. He was a really key person, very bright, had seen many Muslims come to Christ in his area had taught people and he was one of these unusual people who could relate to all sorts of people.

**David Capes** 09:41

Huge loss. Bangladesh is not a country we think a lot about except, in the United States, unfortunately, when there's a flood, when there's a great poverty there, it comes to our attention yet again, but it's a huge country. Well, it's not very large, but there's millions and millions of people there, right?

**Ida Glaser** 10:01

Yes, I should have looked up the number, but I think it's about 170 million.

**David Capes** 10:07

So roughly half the population of the United States.

**Ida Glaser** 10:10

A lot of a lot of people, wonderful people,

**David Capes** 10:13

So how many Christians are there, right? Do you have a sense of how many Christians are there? Because it's mainly Muslim?

**Ida Glaser** 10:18

Yes, it was, yes. I'm afraid I don't know the numbers. There is a small, traditional Christian community. So its roots in the work done by William Carey there. So that's quite an established Christian community, which mostly came from the Hindu background. And they use a Hindu based version of Bangla. So you then have the majority Muslim community, which use what we call Muslim language, Bengali, which has similar grammar and syntax, but the vocabulary comes over from Arabic and Persian and Urdu. So there are a lot of different words used, and especially religious language,

**David Capes** 11:02

Communicating would be a real challenge.

**Ida Glaser** 11:05

There is some challenge here, and particularly if you're thinking of gospel communication, so just to give you one simple example, what word do you use for God? So, the Muslims all use Allah, the One God who created the universe and spoke through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus. So, the Hindus use Isha, which is a word for a deity, and has in Bengali ears an implication that this is one of a huge number of deities. Now, for Carey translating the Bible for Hindus, of course, he uses the word issue, which is used in the Christian community. It won't work in the Muslim community,

**David Capes** 11:58

Because of the idea of plurality.

**Ida Glaser** 12:01

Yeah, it immediately sounds like it sounds like an idolatrous word.

**David Capes** 12:06

That important. Yeah, and yet, a clearer way. Yes, that would be miscommunication or setting up barriers automatically. Yeah.

**Ida Glaser** 12:14

But then there are also very ordinary words like, water, or table. Yeah. Which would be different in the two language groups. So my husband estimates that when they did the translation of the Bible into Muslim language Bengali, they needed 3000 different words in moving from the Hindu language into the full Bible Bible.

**David Capes** 12:43

Yeah. Well, let's talk a little bit because of time, I wish we had more time. But let's talk a little bit about some of the places where you think in Genesis 1 to 11, were reading it alongside other Muslim heritage believers, pays off, what was some of the payoff for you, as you think about this?

**Ida Glaser** 13:05

Well, if you read the Bible with any group of believers, you find them coming at it from different ways, and asking different questions and giving different insights. So a colleague of mine in the Arabic speaking world, says, if you can imagine the Bible, or a book of the Bible, like a field of grass, and the goats are going up and down, and up and down, one little part of this grass, eating it up and eating it up and eating it up until there's hardly any grass left. And they haven't even noticed the grass on the other side. And he says, the Western readings of the Bible are like those goats going up and down and up and down. You know, every scholar is trying to find something else to look at. Right? Whereas there's a huge amount of unmown grass on either side. So this gets us into some of the unmown, unmown grass is a great Emmett. Anwar wrote, when he drafted this app gave a huge amount of space to the location of the Garden of Eden. Where is it? What was it actually like? And people reading the first draft will see, this just takes up too much space? Why does it matter? So in developing this idea, I can imagin why does it matter? Well, it's an obvious answer in Islamic context, we want to get there. Now, what's the story there? Well, the Qur'an has the garden and the temptation story, but in almost every interpretation of the Koran, this garden is paradise. It's in heaven and the very word paradise is a Persian word for garden and describes the fourfold garden. I don't know if you come you have them in America. We've got the Botanical Garden in Oxford is one of these. It's divided into four segments. And in the middle, it's got a fountain. And of course on the Indian subcontinent or in the Middle East, there would be rivers flowing from that to water it the Taj Mahal has one of those in front of it. Yes, yes. Okay. So these are all attempts to recreate paradise. And the idea is that from the Koran that Adam and Eve were sent out of paradise down to the earth, but then after their time of testing on the earth, what they want to do is to get back to the paradise. So as you're reading this in Genesis, if you're sitting reading as a Muslim or a Muslim background believer or you're sitting reading together, people want to know, where was this? What was this like? Now, one of the things that this does within the reading of Genesis, it suddenly brings alive that description. You know, this is not just boring, you know, what was Deleon or whatever it is, this turns into a really zinging description of the paradise of God, which is sometimes described in the Koran as well. And there are similarities and their differences. But as you read it, you more and more think, I want to get back, I want to get back I want to get and then you read the story of how they lost it. They got sent outside, and the door was closed, and they could not get back. Now, the physical location on Earth seems to be where somewhere in about where's now Iraq? Yeah. Which, interestingly, is where the Muslim caliphs built a round city, with four segments, surrounded by all sorts of canals that were irrigating it. They were trying to build paradise there.

**David Capes** 16:55

Was that in Baghdad itself.

**Ida Glaser** 16:57

Yes, that's the round city of Baghdad. Exactly.

**David Capes** 16:59

That's what I've read.

**Ida Glaser** 17:00

Yeah, yeah. And it was completely destroyed by the Mongol invasion. But you have this actual history of the attempt to rebuild it, which is even described in terms of the Eden paradise in some of the Muslim histories. And it's a vivid illustration, we have lost paradise. Now. How does that open up? What we mean by the fall? How does that help you to think about the fact that having lost the land, the Torah is going to take you right to the edge of the promised land? And then stop? How does it read as you go on to Jesus coming and looking for fruit in the land? How does it whet your appetite for the final vision of heaven and the rivers in the water of life. But also, one of the key things when you're talking with Muslim people is that they will generally tell you, we are not fallen, and we do not need redeeming. And you can sit and argue about the doctrine of original sin and try to explain it, as Christians had been trying to explain it for decades, even to each other, even to each other. Right. But what more do you need to demonstrate that we're fallen than this incredible image that we've lost Eden. And then as you read, I mean that this takes you in so many different directions. But Genesis 1 to 11, arguably gives you an understanding of humanity and of the world, which is the basis of modern science. And this story about Eden and the loss of Eden is part of that is one of the things that happens in Eden is that Adam names the animals. Incidentally, in the Koran, God teaches Adam the names. So again, that's a really interesting discussion. And it really alerts you to what is the significance, that Adam is given the job of of naming. And we could discuss that that's a really interesting theological thing. But in the scientific context, what happened in in the early modern era, was that people started to ask whether they could rebuild Eden by finding the Adamic names. Really? Yeah. Did you not know that? This this is really interesting, David, you've really missed something. Yeah, yep. In the ancient in the monasteries at that period, you would have the Bible alongside the bestiary because you have to read the book of God's works alongside the book of God's words. And if you look in some of those bestiaries, you will find that they give the names of each animal in a whole number of languages Chaldean in Hebrew. Why is that? Because they're searching for the pre Adamic language, which They think we'll give them the authority, the naming power.

**David Capes** 20:04

Well, it sounds a bit magical, doesn't it? If we have the right word...

**Ida Glaser** 20:09

Sounds like that to you, but it didn't sound like the power of language. It's something that's some of the modern philosophers understand it. Yes, yes. Maybe evangelical Christians don't.

**David Capes** 20:21

No it's powerful there's no doubt.

**Ida Glaser** 20:23

Yeah. And you know, the power of the word is there from the beginning to end of the Bible. But as the Reformation began, people began to realize that no, you could not go back to that language. Because we're fallen. And after Babel, that languages are confused, and you can't go back. Before Babel. On the other hand, if we are redeemed, the redeemed people of God being remade in the image of God can begin to name the animals and the plants. And and and so the very first catalog from the Botanical Gardens in Oxford, which I think is the second oldest in Europe, it's it's a list of the names of the plants. And you know what it's called? Adam in Eden, Adam? Oh, wow. Yes. And if you read the preface, it will tell you that, that this is this is what is going on. We're naming and categorizing these plants as Adam named in Eden.

**David Capes** 21:24

Wow, fascinating stuff.

**Ida Glaser** 21:27

Within the Bible, within Genesis one to 11, one of the things that this focus on Eden does, it makes you recognize that you've got a chiastic form running between Genesis two and Genesis four, which is centered on the loss of Eden because of the disobedience. And you can then begin to see the deliberate parallels between Genesis two and genesis four what's going on inside Eden and what's going on outside Eden. So that really opens up in a vivid new way. What the results are of the fall. Yeah. How's that for a small taster?

**David Capes** 22:04

Well, it's a it's a mouthful, that's for sure. It's not just a small taste. We're talking today to Ida Glosser, who is one of the authors of a new commentary series called windows on the text, Bible commentaries for Muslim context Genesis 1 to 11, which is the seed of so much, so much good. I want to hear more about this series. One day, Dr. Glasser, thanks for being with us today.

**Ida Glaser** 22:30

Thank you.

**David Capes** 22:31

Stick around for a nugget of wisdom from Dr. Ida Glosser. Thanks to our crackerjack staff at the Lanier library that helped us produce this podcast, Janet Siefert, Cathy Capes, Jocelyn Soliz if you enjoyed the podcast, please share it with a friend. Rate us so that others can find us please. Thank you. If you have questions or comments, you'd like us to be in touch we'd love to hear from you. Contact us podcast at linear library dot orgy Till next time, thanks for listening.

**Ida Glaser** 23:04

While differing widely in the little bits that we know, in our infinite ignorance, we are all equal