

## Part II: Relational Bible Storying and Scripture Use in Oral Muslim Contexts

by Jack Colgate

The first of this two-part series described a relational Bible storying approach to gospel sowing and discipling. This approach developed as I identified my own tendency to “target” Muslims with Bible stories, rather than come alongside them relationally to share my own stories as well as draw out their stories. But my mission practice, specifically with regard to Bible storying, was to develop even further. Why? First of all, in my mission context I observed that not too many oral culture Muslim followers of Jesus felt comfortable or confident in telling a Bible story orally. But they seemed to be more confident to read Bible stories and portions out loud—even if poorly—and to lead others to read out loud those same Scriptures. Furthermore, they had an appreciation from their Muslim upbringing of the importance of reciting credal statements and simple prayers from the Scriptures.

Secondly, my own biblical study and reflection gave me a deeper understanding of the two main ways that we can use the Bible—as a literary document and as an orally communicated word. I discovered what the Bible itself said about the role and significance of *both* the orally communicated word *and* the written word.

I also discovered that—while perhaps the most profoundly transforming way to approach the Bible is to understand it as God’s story, as a gospel of what God has done—the Bible contains more than just narrative. Thus it is more than just God’s Story. In fact, there are at least three other interpretive categories for Scripture: it is God’s Word, the response of God’s people and God’s inspired casebook.

Thus, in this article I would like to outline what the Bible itself says about the role and importance of the Scriptures as both a holy written word and a holy orally communicated word. I will also describe four interpretive categories for the Scriptures and include examples and suggestions from my Asian mission context of how we can use the Bible with oral culture Muslims and followers of Jesus based on these four interpretive categories.

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## Two Major Ways to Use Scripture

Throughout the history of God's people, the Scriptures have been used in two major ways: as a literary document (holy writ) and as an orally communicated word (holy word) (see Figure 1).

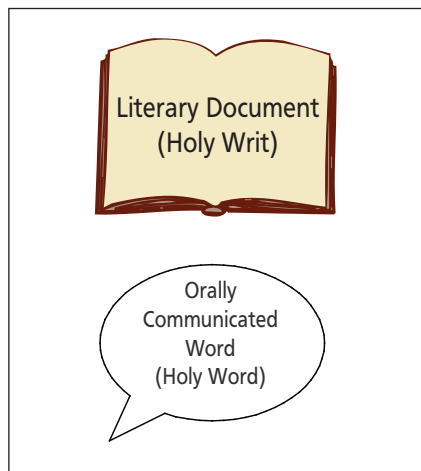


Figure 1. Two Major Ways to Use Scripture (Adapted from Weber 1995 and Graham 1987)

Studying and using the Bible as holy writ, as a literary document, is the most common way that literates from an evangelical tradition with a strong commitment to the Bible engage the Scriptures. Most often, the Bible is studied by reading it silently and in private. However, as mission strategists are now discovering and pointing out, this way of studying the Bible to which literate disciples of Jesus are accustomed is not very understandable or reproducible among the world's oral learners.

Thankfully, for today's oral learners there is a well-established precedent both in Bible times and throughout most of church history of using Scripture mainly as a holy word, as an orally communicated word. In the following section, I turn to the "Bible times" portion of the history of God's people and provide a summary of notable biblical examples of some of the ways that the word was communicated orally. However, before providing a summary from the Bible of the ways that the word was communicated orally, it is important as well to note what some biblical texts themselves

indicate regarding the role and significance of the written word.

### The Bible as a Literary Document

What does the Bible itself say about both the role and the significance of the written word? Below I list some of the most notable biblical examples.

*First of all, a number of biblical passages record that God himself specifically instructed various Bible characters to put in writing what they had seen or heard: a record of battle (Ex 17:14) or of the stages in Israel's journey (Num 33:2), the words of the covenant and the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:27–28; compare with Ex 34:1 and Dt 5:22), a song (Dt 31:19–22), an oracle or prophecy (Is 30:8; Jer 30:2; 36:2; Hab 2:2), letters and visions (Rev 1:9, 11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). These specific instructions indicate "that it is God's desire that there be a written text" (Klem 1982:18). Thus the whole idea of material that is written is "integral to the notion of scripture" (Goldingay 1994:100).*

*Secondly, various biblical passages indicate that the written word has an enduring nature and sense of permanence as an unchanging witness and testimony to future generations.<sup>1</sup> Job expresses a desire that his words be "written on a scroll" and "engraved on a rock forever" (Job 19:23–24). The psalmist instructs that his words be "written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord" (Ps 102:18). Isaiah was commanded to write an oracle on a tablet or scroll so that "for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness" (Is 30:8). Habakkuk was instructed to write down the oracle that he received for its fulfillment awaited "an appointed time" (Hab 2:2–3).*

*Thirdly, a number of scriptural passages point to the role of the written word as an authoritative reference point in establishing and verifying the certainty of what we believe. Luke undertook to "write an orderly account" of events passed on by eyewitnesses so that Theophilus (and by implication all subsequent readers) could "know the certainty of the things*

you have been taught" (Lk 1:3–4). Paul acknowledged that what he received and passed on was "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3–4) and that he believed "everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14).

*Finally, there are numerous scriptural passages that point to the role of the written word as an authoritative standard or measure.<sup>2</sup> Words, deeds, beliefs and behavior are checked against this standard to see that they are faithful to and in accordance with the written word. Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal "according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (Jos 8:31). Ezekiel was instructed to write down the design, regulations and laws of the temple so that the people of Israel would be "faithful to its design and follow all its regulations" (43:11). The Bereans "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). This role of the written word as an authoritative standard or measure was certainly in the minds of Jesus and the apostles (and the biblical authors) as they made frequent reference to the written Scriptures. "It is written" (the English rendering of the Greek *gegraptai*) occurs 106 times in the New Testament (Wiseman, Kitchen, and Millard 1982:1266).*

### The Bible as an Orally Communicated Word

What does the Bible itself note regarding some of the ways that the word was communicated orally? Numerous examples abound; this is not surprising, given that much of the content of the Bible itself existed as an orally communicated word, as oral tradition, before it was written down. However, my comments below are confined to recording some of the most notable biblical examples of the ways that the word was communicated orally.

*Both the Old Testament and New Testament contain many passages that were originally sung. We see this most notably in the Psalms; the superscriptions of many of the psalms indicate that they*

were to be sung. Other ancient songs are included in the Old Testament as well, such as the song of Moses and the Israelites (Ex 15:1–18), the song of Miriam (Ex 15:21), and the song of Deborah and Barak (Jos 5).<sup>3</sup> New Testament examples of songs include four hymns in Luke 1–2 as well as those preserved in some of the epistles of Paul (Col 1:15–20; Eph 5:14; Phil 2:6–11; 1 Tim 3:16) (Barker 1995:1535, 1819).<sup>4</sup>

*The Bible reflects as well the importance given to the hearing and the speaking of the biblical message.* “Hear, O Israel,” declared Moses to the people (Dt 4:1; 5:1; 6:3,4; 9:1; 20:3). Likewise, the prophets frequently prefaced their utterances with “Hear the word of the LORD.” Parents were to tell or recite to their children the stories of God’s mighty deeds experienced in the Exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, the wilderness, and crossing of the Jordan (Ps 78; Ex 12:26–27; 13: 8, 14–15; Dt 6:7, 20–25; Jos 4:6–7, 21–24). The law was to be on the lips of covenant believers (Ex 13:9; compare with Ps 50:16). It was not to depart from their mouths (Jos 1:8). It was to be murmured day and night (Ps 1:2).<sup>5</sup> Even after it was written down, it was to be read publicly (Dt 17:19; 31:11; Jos 8:34–35; 2 Kg 23:2; cf. 2 Ch 34:29–30; Neh 8:1–8; cf. Lk 14:16–19; Acts 13:15, 27; 15:21). Paul stressed the importance of continuing this practice in the life of the early church (1 Tim 4:13), including the public reading of his letters (Col 4:16; 1 Th 5:27). John’s prologue to the book of Revelation includes the “little-known New Testament beatitude” (Weber 1995:2) pronouncing a blessing upon the “one who reads the words of this prophecy” and on “those who hear it and take it to heart” (Rev 1:3).<sup>6</sup>

*Jesus himself provided an example of powerful oral communication of the Scriptures.* For example, while walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he did not pull out a “pocket Bible” as he opened up to them Moses, the Prophets and “all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Lk 24:27).

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Rather, he spoke from his memory of the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that although he could read (Lk 4:16) and most likely write (Jn 8:6,8), as far as we know he did not write down any of his teachings or stories (Coward 1988:36, 162).<sup>7</sup>

In summary to this point, the Bible itself points to significant roles of Scripture in both its literate and oral dimensions. Thus, any framework for Scripture use in an oral context should consider both of these ways of engaging Scripture. On the one hand, in the oral context in which many literate missionaries and Christian workers find themselves today, a greater appreciation is needed of the many ways that Scripture can function as an orally communicated word. It can be recited, memorized, story told, and sung. We need to enhance our understanding as literates of the importance of using Scripture in ways other than literate Bible study.<sup>8</sup> Engaging Scripture for gospel sowing and discipling in an oral context should not depend on literacy (cf. Klem 1982:18).

However, on the other hand, even as we literates reconnect with the many dynamic ways that Scripture can be communicated orally, it is important that we not devalue the significance of the written word. As mission strategies are developed for evangelism and discipleship among the world’s oral peoples, our renewed appreciation for the orally communicated word does not mean that a commitment to the written word should be abandoned.<sup>9</sup> “Writtenness and orality are not finally antithetical, but complementary; the absence or loss of either is significant” (Graham 1987:159).

### **Four Interpretive Categories for Scripture**

I have described above the two main ways that Scripture has been and can

continue to be used by disciples of Jesus and seekers alike. Particularly in an oral context, using the Bible as an orally communicated word is important for helping oral disciples of Jesus and seekers both to understand biblical truth as well as to recommunicate this truth to others (i.e., reproduce). In order to enhance understanding and reproducibility even further, however, a closer look also at our interpretive approach to the content of Scripture is also helpful. Thus I describe below four categories for interpreting the Bible: God’s story, God’s word, the response of God’s people, and God’s inspired casebook (see Figure 2).

I also include practical suggestions for using the Bible in an oral Muslim context with these four interpretive categories in mind: as a storybook, lectionary, *Kitab* through which God speaks, *Kitab* of instruction, *Kitab* of wisdom, songbook, prayerbook, source of creeds, and casebook for various themes and issues (see Figure 3).

### **God’s Story**

The development of various Bible narrative or storytelling formats in recent western mission history have led to a rediscovery of the Bible as God’s story.<sup>10</sup> In what ways is it God’s story? First of all, it is God’s story because there is an overarching historically grounded story in general chronological order to which the whole of Scripture testifies. God’s story tells of God at work in human history from creation to consummation for the salvation of all peoples and for his ultimate glory. Its main parts would include the creation of the world and of humanity, humankind’s fall into sin, God’s redemptive work in and through the patriarchs and his people Israel, a climax or central scene in the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the stories of the early believ-



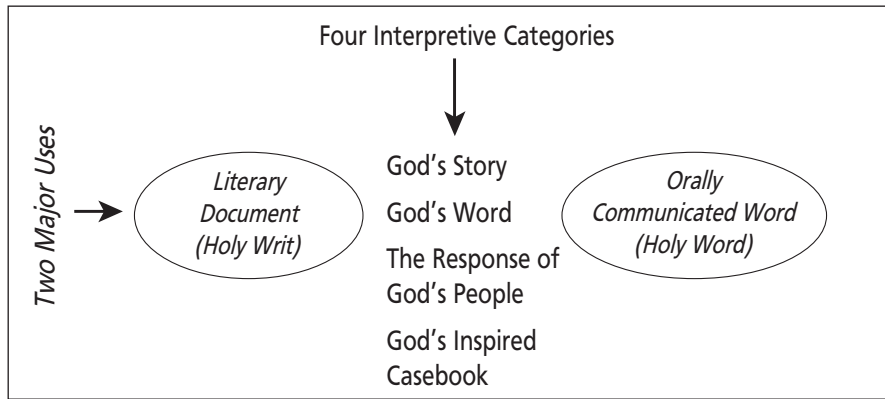


Figure 2. Two Major Uses of and Four Interpretive Categories for Scripture

ers (i.e., the church), and the expected return of Christ and the new creation.

As followers of Jesus the Messiah, we believe that this story to which the Bible is witness is not just any story. Rather, it is the greatest story ever told. It is the greatest story ever told because it is the gospel, “an account of something God has done” (Goldingay 1994:23). It is the record of what God did “once for all” (Jude 3; Rom 6:10).

Secondly, the Bible is God’s story in the sense that much of the content of the Bible is in story form, a fact that is readily recognized by Sunday School teachers and Bible storyers alike. The “bulk of Scripture takes the form of narrative,” that is, it consists of “longer and shorter narrative works” (Goldingay 1994:22–23). The tendency to mine precepts, principles and three-point sermons from Scripture has sometimes blinded literate readers and students of the Bible to the actual story form of much of the Bible.

What, then, are the implications for ministry in an oral Muslim setting that the Bible is God’s story? Well, quite simply, the Bible can be presented and used as a storybook. It can be used as a storybook in the two ways mentioned in my previous article: to tell single point-of-need stories as well as to tell a chronologically developed series of Bible stories.<sup>11</sup>

Since much has already been written about telling various chronologically developed series of Bible stories, I will only make two brief comments here.

First, although Bible stories (and non-narrative passages) may eventually be read out loud together lectionary style in a gathering of believers and seekers (as I explain below), for greatest impact among oral learners Bible stories need to be told orally. Preferably they should be told in the heart language of the people; if that is not possible they can be storied in a common national language or an understandable trade language.

Secondly, I believe that understanding the Bible as God’s Story provides an anchoring base in the gospel for all other ways that the Bible is interpreted and used.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the oral telling of a series of God’s gospel story (starting from the Old Testament and not just the stories of Jesus) should be repeated

fairly often in the ongoing life of a gathering of believers in Jesus.

### God’s Word

The Bible is not only God’s story. It is also God’s word. In what ways is it God’s word? First of all, it is God’s word in that there are parts of Scripture that are nonnarrative in genre, which more “explicitly teach or preach” (Goldingay 1997:1). Among these would be the law from Exodus to Deuteronomy, wisdom literature, prophetic writings, visions (apocalyptic literature) and letters of the apostles.

Furthermore, there is a way in which all of Scripture, including its narrative portions, is meant to convey God’s word to us—his warnings and promises and his call to repent, to believe, to turn from idols and to turn to him, to engage in mission, to worship, to help the poor, and to suffer. As we either read and study the Scriptures (in its literate dimensions) or recite and listen to the Scriptures (in its oral-aural dimensions),

suddenly we may become aware that behind and through the stories, texts and visualized messages stands someone who looks at us, speaks to us and gives us guidance. The object of our inquiry becomes the subject who addresses us and understands us

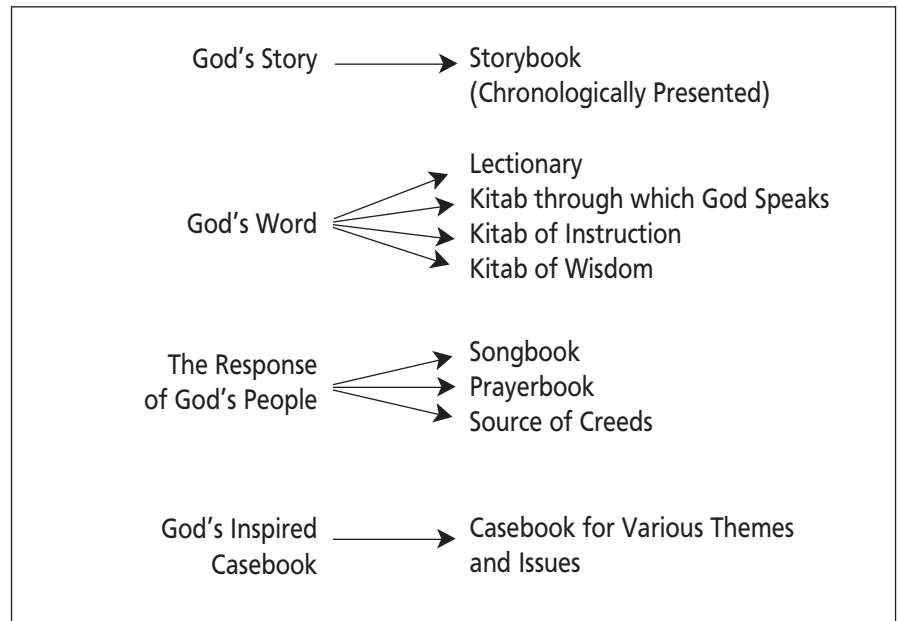


Figure 3. Using the Bible in an Oral Muslim Context

better than we do ourselves. We are confronted with the living God who acts in creation and history, in our personal life and in the world of nations (Weber 1995:x).

More than any of the other categories for approaching Scripture, the Bible as God's word connotes that expectancy that we have to hear God speak to us through our reading or hearing of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Various scriptural examples indicate how this kind of encounter with God through the reading, hearing and explanation of the Scriptures can bring conviction, repentance and a deep heart response. For example, in response to the Scriptures, Josiah tore his clothes (2 Ch 34:19), the Israelites wept (Neh 8:9), Daniel sought the Lord in prayer and fasting (Dan 9:2–3), and the hearts of the two Emmaus road disciples burned within them (Lk 24:32).

There is a need to reflect more deeply upon how the Bible can be used as God's word in an oral Muslim context. This is because the resurgence of interest in various narrative formats of evangelism and discipleship in recent western mission history has, in some cases, resulted in a tendency to overlook the use of various nonnarrative portions of scripture.<sup>14</sup> However, an interpretation of Scripture that leaves little room for anything other than viewing the Bible as God's story will encounter trouble in understanding and presenting what Paul called the "whole will of God" (Acts 20:27; cf. the reference to "all Scripture" in 2 Tim 3:16).

Perhaps an illustration from parenting will help to explain how the Bible should be interpreted as more than simply God's story. With our own children, my wife and I know the value of telling stories. In our morning devotional times and on occasions when we are counseling and instructing our children, we have observed that they respond well to the telling of stories from our own lives, the lives of others, and from the Bible. However, there are times when we are more directive. We convey commands, lay down rules, offer encouragement and praise, issue

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warnings, enforce discipline, and provide instructions. There are also times when we are quiet and allow our children to respond to us and to God. Our family would not function well if all we did as parents was to tell stories. In a similar way, we can observe how God's communication to us in the Scriptures is patterned in such a way as to be more than simply God's story.

In an oral Muslim context, how can the Bible function as God's word?<sup>15</sup> First of all, it can be used as a lectionary or a book of readings. I have already provided in the previous section numerous examples from both Testaments that illustrate or enjoin the public reading of Scripture. In a similar manner, gatherings of Muslim seekers and new believers in Jesus can use the Scripture as a lectionary or a book of readings. If all can read, then the Scripture portion for the day can be read out loud, usually verse by verse in turn by each reader. If some or all of the gathered believers read poorly, the passage of Scripture can be shortened and can be read together slowly and out loud at least twice. If only a few can read, then one of the readers can be the assigned reader or lector to read and reread the passage out loud. If no one is able to read, the seekers and believers could listen to recorded Scripture.<sup>16</sup> As following the telling of Bible stories, the reading of Scripture should be followed by two types of simple questions: those that encourage listeners to retell the story or its main points and those that elicit discussion and application.

When the Bible is used as a lectionary, it is helpful to explain to believers what we have already noted above, namely, that through the Holy Book God speaks to us. Or, to state it differently, we could say that even as we recite this *Kitab* or holy book it, in fact, is reading us (Weber 1995)! More accurately, God is

reading us—right down to the deepest places of our minds and hearts.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to being a lectionary and a *Kitab* or book through which God speaks to us, the Scriptures as God's word function as a *Kitab* of instruction. As a whole, this *Kitab* is useful for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). However, it also contains specific sections that are more distinctly instruction-oriented. Among these would be expoundings on the law (Dt 1:5), calls to covenantal obedience and faithfulness (Dt 5:1–3), and the teachings of Jesus (e.g., Mt 5:1–7:29). In addition, the epistles convey commands (1 Cor 7:10; 2 Th 3:12), directives (1 Cor 11:17), appeals (1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 10:1), urgings (Rom 12:1; 1 Tim 1:3; 2:1), instructions (1 Tim 1:18; 5:21), and "reminders to stimulate to wholesome thinking" (2 Pet 3:1).<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the Bible as God's word also functions as a *Kitab* of wisdom. The "holy Scriptures" as a whole are able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). However, the Bible as a *Kitab* of wisdom also contains distinctive proverbs, parables of Jesus, and sayings of counsel and common sense that lead to a life of wisdom, relational wholeness and discipline. These portions of Scripture fit particularly well in our mission context, since the people among whom we work value indirect methods of confrontation, allusion, allegory, symbolic and parabolic speech.

In application to an oral Muslim context, engaging the Bible as a *Kitab* of instruction and as a *Kitab* of wisdom can be nurtured by the ongoing corporate reciting, chanting or singing (if culturally appropriate), and memorizing of passages from the Torah, wisdom literature, prophetic writings, visions, and New Testament

letters. However, in order to encourage followers of Jesus in the Muslim context to understand the Scriptures as most fundamentally pointing us to the gospel story of God's grace, it is wise to keep returning at regular intervals to the telling of a salvation series of Bible stories.

### The Response of God's People

God's story and God's word were recounted orally and fixed in writing through the inspired words of human communicators and writers who experienced and reflected upon God's deeds and words. Thus we can also say that the whole of Scripture, in addition to being God's story and God's word, is in one sense the response of God's people (cf. Goldingay 1997:118).

However, there are parts of Scripture that more explicitly or overtly reflect this response of the people of God.<sup>19</sup> As the response of God's people, the Bible contains expressions and songs of praise, prayers, thanksgivings, calls to worship, laments, confessions of sin, and benedictions. Most notable in this regard, of course, is the book of Psalms, which is a whole "anthology of prayers, worship songs, and poems sung and spoken in public and private worship" (Bullock 2001:22).

Although the book of Psalms is the premier example of Scripture that overtly voices the response of God's people, various expressions of response by God's people are also scattered throughout other narrative and nonnarrative portions of Scripture. Consider, for example, the prayer of Moses asking for a revelation of God's presence and glory (Ex 33:12–18), the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24–26), Nehemiah's prayer (Neh 1:5–11), Job's prayers of contrition before the Lord (Job 40:4–5; 42:2–6), Daniel's confession and intercession (Dan 9:4–19), the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–13), the prayer of the early believers for boldness and miracles in Jesus' name (Acts 4:24–30), and several of the songs of praise in Revelation (in chapters 5, 7, 11, 15). Many more examples could be given.

How can the Bible as the response of God's people function in an oral Muslim context? First of all, the Bible can function as a songbook, as a source of songs to be sung in private and corporate worship. We have already noted that the Bible contains passages that were originally sung. Disciples of Jesus in the Muslim context can follow the tradition of the people of God both in Bible times and throughout subsequent church history by continuing to sing these and other passages of Scripture in contextually appropriate styles. In security-sensitive contexts where corpo-



rate singing might be inappropriate, an individual singer or cantor could sing or chant softly. Lyrics may be a verbatim quoting or a poetic adaptation of biblical texts. Benefits of setting Scripture to music are at least twofold: music touches the affective and even physical aspects of our being, and meter, rhyme and melody serve as mnemonic aids in the memorization of Scripture.

Secondly, the Bible as the response of God's people can also function in an oral Muslim context as a prayerbook. Traditional favorites such as the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, and the prayer of the penitent tax collector (Lk 18:13) can be memorized and used in private or corporate worship. These prayers may also be set to music.

Thirdly, the Bible as the response of God's people can be used in an oral Muslim context as a source of creeds, both those that are based on Scripture as well as those that quote verbatim

from Scripture. We occasionally use a confession of faith developed for our mission context that strings together eight New Testament verses or passages,<sup>20</sup> confessing belief in the one God and salvation through Jesus. It also affirms faith in the incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as his power over the spirit realm.

### God's Inspired Casebook

Finally, the Bible is God's inspired casebook.<sup>21</sup> The Bible is more than simply God's message, either in narrative or propositional format. It is also a book of revelatory events or case stories that reveals the process of encounter between God and human beings. With faith in God's continued leading and through analogy,<sup>22</sup> contemporary readers and hearers can apply insights from these illustrative biblical case stories to real-life and real-ministry situations today.

This understanding of the Bible seems to have been in the mind of the writer of Hebrews when presenting a whole string of case stories illustrating how the saints of old responded in faith to God (Heb 11). The writer intended his present-day readers to learn lessons from these heroes of the faith, for in verse 4 he notes that Abel by faith "still speaks." Likewise, Paul told his readers that the stories of Israel's wanderings in the desert and rebellion happened as "examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Cor 10:11). Jude follows a similar pattern for his readers, reminding them of a number of stories from Israel's past history that were to serve as examples (see particularly verses 5 and 7; cf. 1 Jn 3:12).<sup>23</sup> Finally, Jesus himself encouraged his disciples to rejoice in the midst of persecution, comparing their suffering to that of the prophets of old (Mt 5:12; Lk 6:23).

How can the Bible function as God's inspired casebook in an oral Muslim culture? In contextualized ministries to Muslims, this interpretive category for the Bible has played a significant role over the past two to three



decades. The Bible has been used as a casebook for various themes and issues such as church planting, evangelism, discipling, intercession, ministries of healing and deliverance, developing contextual theologies, and holistic ministry. What should receive added emphasis now among missionaries and Christian workers is learning to step back and to allow communities of believers themselves to engage the Scriptures as God's inspired casebook for them. As they corporately read and hear the Bible as God's story and as God's word, and as they corporately nurture their life of faith by using scriptural songs, prayers, confessions of faith and readings, the Bible as God's inspired casebook will come alive for them. Even if they cannot read, the Holy Spirit will direct them to issues, themes, and motifs that are of particular relevance and significance to them.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

In summary, then, this article has attempted first of all to strengthen the theoretical framework for how we might use and interpret the Bible. I have described the two ways that Scripture can be used (as a literary document and as an orally communicated word). Particularly for literate workers and disciples of Jesus, an appreciation is needed of the many dynamic ways that the Scriptures can be used orally. However, this does not mean that we should neglect our commitment to the written word. This framework for using and interpreting Scripture also included the outlining of four interpretive categories for the Bible. Description of these four categories also included practical suggestions for using the Bible in an oral Muslim context, based on each of these four ways of interpreting Scripture. The Bible as God's story can be used as a storybook to tell single point-of-need stories or to tell a chronologically developed series of Bible stories. As God's word, the Bible can be used as a lectionary, a *Kitab* through which God speaks, a

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*Kitab* of instruction and a *Kitab* of wisdom. As the response of God's people, the Bible can be used as a songbook, as a prayerbook, and as a source of creeds or confessions of faith. Finally, as God's inspired casebook it can be read or heard corporately by the community of new believers in order to discern the issues and themes that the Holy Spirit himself brings to light for their life together and witness. **IJFM**

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Walter Ong who notes that, in spite of the "massive oral underpinnings" of the Bible, the written word is necessary to supplement the spoken word, to give it enduring stability and permanence (1967:318–321; 190–191). Another whole topic of discussion, of course, is that hand-copied texts can be corrupted, the danger of which is perhaps already hinted at by Revelation 22:18. The falsifying of the Torah, Zabur and Injil is something of which Muslim tradition accuses Christians and Jews. However, the Qur'an itself "does not charge Jews or Christians with having a corrupt written text" (Woodberry 1999).

<sup>2</sup> These roles of the written word as an authoritative standard as well as an authoritative reference point correspond to the notion of "canon" (a transliteration of the Greek word rendered "rule" in Galatians 6:16) as it has been applied to the written word. As canon, Scripture "both prospectively lays down the nature of Christian discipleship and retrospectively tests whether that is being lived up to" (Goldingay 1994:86).

<sup>3</sup> We could possibly include as well the Song of Songs, associated with Solomon (1:1). According to 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon wrote 1005 songs.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber indicates that many non-poetic scriptural passages were "also originally not only recited but chanted. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts contain signs which are almost certainly musical annotations. Attempts have been made to decipher these signs or to go back from ancient Jewish singing to the original biblical melodies" (1995:5).

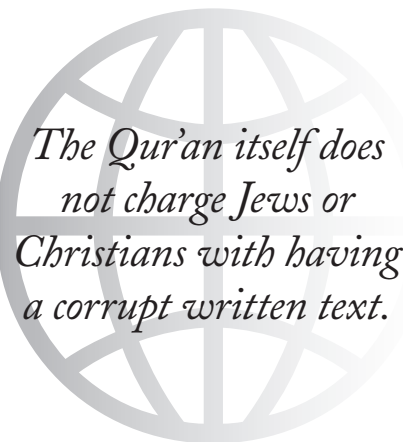
<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word that is translated "meditate" in Psalm 1:2 literally means "to murmur in a low voice" (Weber 1995:54).

<sup>6</sup> Commenting on this passage, William Graham contends that in the early church the "written text was still an oral phenomenon."

He continues, "The sacred books carried both the special authority of the written page and the living immediacy of oral reading and recitation. Oral reading and recitation were the primary means through which the written word was apprehended and reflected upon, as well as communicated, not only among the illiterate but also among the educated members of the community" (1987:123).

<sup>7</sup> Notes Harold Coward, "Although Jesus' teaching was first given in Aramaic, no early Christian writings in Aramaic have come down to us, and we have no certain knowledge that any such writings ever existed" (1988:36).

<sup>8</sup> Study of the Bible as a literary textbook is deeply engrained in the practice of



most literates, particularly from the West. At the back of my copy of the popular and widely read New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, the publisher (Zondervan) has included some Bible study helps. A short section entitled "How to Study the Bible" makes this comment, "But to get into the heart of what God is saying to you, you also have to study the Bible as you would a textbook. This type of Bible study is a vital part of growing to spiritual maturity" (Bible Study Helps 1984:887).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, CBS practitioners note anecdotal reports that in some places "literacy tripled in the aftermath of the introduction of storying" (Official Chronological Bible Storying Website n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> The categories of God's story, God's word, and the response of God's people presented in this article come from John Goldingay's short, popular-style book entitled *How to Read the Bible* (1997). He looks at the Bible as mainly God's story and God's word, but includes Psalms, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Job under another category in which Israel's response to God is overtly expressed. In two earlier scholarly works (1994, 1995) he discusses a

doctrinal understanding of and interpretational approach to Scripture based on four models that correspond broadly to the four main blocks or genres of biblical material: witnessing tradition, authoritative canon, inspired word and experienced revelation.

<sup>11</sup> One type of chronological Bible storying is called fast tracking: condensing the telling of a series of stories into one sitting.

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser makes a similar point when presenting what he calls the "promise-plan of God" as the unifying theme embracing both Testaments and arising naturally from the text itself. Kaiser's contention is that without a grasp of this promise-plan of God, expository preaching and teaching of the individual parts of the Bible "will be difficult" and will "remain stunted" (2003:30–38). More explicitly, Carl Armerding proposes that what he calls "story exegesis"—in which story telling becomes the "primary goal of our exegetical and hermeneutic task"—is necessary if the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, is to be heard again in our day. He adds, "I have become increasingly convinced that the entire Bible, but especially the Old Testament, is best understood as story, and that story, Israel's 'story of salvation,' is fundamental to all other categories of interpretation" (1994:40–41).

<sup>13</sup> R. Daniel Shaw and Charles E. Van Engen believe that the ability through the biblical text to hear God, to be drawn to know God as he originally intended is the crucial issue at the heart of all scriptural translation, interpretation and gospel communication (2003:42).

<sup>14</sup> Consider, for example, Trevor McIlwain's lengthy seven-phase chronological Bible teaching approach (1987–92). Originally developed for use in the Philippines, this chronological teaching method is now used among tribals in other areas of the world. It has even been adapted for use in a western context. However, the list of Scripture portions to be used makes no mention of the poetic and wisdom literature of the Old Testament outside of messianic passages from the Psalms.

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Graham's work for helping me to crystallize some suggestions presented in this article for using the Bible in an oral Muslim context. Graham writes that for Muslims, the "Qur'an is prayer-book, lectionary and hymnal rolled into one" (1987:102).

<sup>16</sup> This would of course necessitate access to an audio media device, either powered by battery or electricity or by hand. One example of the extensive use of listen-



ing to recorded Scriptures in groups is from a ministry in India. A listening coordinator—often illiterate and not yet a follower of Jesus—invites friends, family and neighbors to his/her home to listen to the audio Scriptures. After three to six months of listening, an evangelist follows up with the coordinators and listeners. As of 2000, this particular ministry was facilitating listening groups in 3200 villages (Hoekstra 2000).

<sup>17</sup> In an oral Muslim context, one way to foster an engagement with Scripture as a book of readings through which God reads our hearts and speaks to us is through the use or adaptation of the early monastic practice of *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* (divine reading) “consists of a daily attempt to listen to God’s word within a prescribed biblical text” and includes reading, rereading, memorization, meditation, silent prayer and contemplation (Weber 1995:48–49). It is a “devotional way of reading the Scriptures whose aim is unashamedly to generate spiritual nourishment rather than academic or intellectual information” (Horsfall 2001:118). A group of gathered believers and seekers could follow the suggestions for reading already noted above, but with added time for quiet listening to God and sharing of and praying through what God impresses on the hearts of each one. Another early monastic practice that could be used or adapted to develop this understanding of the Bible as a *Kitab* through which God reads our hearts and speaks to us is that of *meditatio*. *Meditatio* involves the repeated oral recitation of a scriptural text in order to ruminate on or chew and re-chew the words of the text, internalize and translate them into practice (Graham 1987:134; cf. Weber 1995:54–55). In an oral Muslim context, a community of believers could choose one of the Scripture verses from the *lectio divina* to memorize. Each member would take this verse with them through constant recitation during the routine of daily activities. At a subsequent gathering, believers could share stories about how God spoke to them through this memorized and recited text.

<sup>18</sup> These instruction-oriented parts of the epistles are acknowledged as flowing from the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Thes 3:6).

<sup>19</sup> There is some overlap between the interpretive categories that I present. For example, Goldingay includes the books of Ecclesiastes and Job under the category of response of God’s people since they “speak to God as much as about God.” However, he notes that it is “slightly arbitrary” to treat these two books separately from Proverbs

since they also “embody the approach to life of Israel’s wise, and they too are meant to teach—in this sense they belong to “The word of God to the people” (1997:130). Of course one could add that Job could be classified in one sense as a story, a story that includes long stretches of poetic and dramatic dialogue.

<sup>20</sup> Mark 12:32; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 3:8; Colossians 1:13; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Peter 3:21–22; John 17:3; and 1 Timothy 1:17.

<sup>21</sup> The term “God’s inspired casebook” is taken from Kraft, and my explanation of this term basically follows as well Kraft’s description and explanation (1979:194–215, 398–399).

<sup>22</sup> Miriam Adeney explains how analogy allows for this process of learning from stories (or in our case, from biblical case studies). “Some of our best learning is by analogy. Even if a story’s locale is strange, we tend to identify it with our own context by analogy. Since we live in specific circumstances ourselves, we can connect with specific story situations more than with abstractions” (2002:152).

<sup>23</sup> See Richard Pratt on how Old Testament narrative writers anticipated issues their audiences faced in three ways: by establishing (i.e., describing) the historical origins of present beliefs and practices, by presenting models that were to be either imitated or avoided, or by composing their accounts of the past to show how they adumbrated or foreshadowed the experience of the readers (1990:262–269). These last two methods of anticipation by Old Testament writers correspond with a model for Scripture as God’s inspired casebook.

<sup>24</sup> As the Bible is used as God’s inspired casebook, it is important to keep in mind that as casebook it remains in one sense a subset of the Bible as God’s story. As we have already noted, the Bible testifies to us of what God did “once for all” (Jude 3; Rom 6:10). Thus, “there is nothing more to be fulfilled, added, or completed” to the sequence of God’s story that finds its fullest expression in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Van Engen 1996:82). This means that there will always be a gospel foundation to the illustrative biblical case stories that is not to be tampered with, inflated or diluted. To do so would lead to syncretism, that is, producing a “gospel other than the one we preached” (Gal 1:8). Thus, even as we apply the biblical case stories to ever new contexts, we always remember and glory in the old, old story of what God has done.