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## The Seven Heavens: Genealogy and Cosmology in the Noble Qur'an and the Two Testaments: A Comparative Approach<sup>doi</sup>

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### Abstract

The study of cosmological structures in sacred texts has been a central focus of theological and inter-textual scholarship. This research analyzes the concept of the "Seven Heavens" as presented in the Noble Qur'an, compares it with references in the Two Testaments, and investigates the concept's underlying epistemological and exegetical foundations. Employing a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology, the study utilizes content analysis of Qur'anic verses, texts from the Two Testaments, and authoritative exegetical works in comparative theology. The findings demonstrate that, while both Abrahamic traditions acknowledge the concept of heaven and its multiplicity, the Noble Qur'an articulates the notion of the "Seven Heavens" with greater precision and detail, depicting it as an orderly, multilayered structure within divine creation. From symbolic and structural perspectives, this concept can be examined alongside scientific and astronomical models developed in later centuries, enabling deeper interpretation and illustrating the Qur'an's scientific inimitability. Although the Two Testaments do not explicitly reference the number seven in this context,

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they describe multiple heavenly levels, thus providing a foundation for interreligious dialogue among monotheistic faiths.

**Keywords:** Comparative Cosmology, Phenomenology of Religion, Hermeneutics, Cosmic Theology, Symbolism of the Number Seven.

### Introduction

Humanity's desire to understand the structure of the cosmos and its place within it is as old as civilization itself. It has long motivated philosophical, scientific, and religious reflection (Russell, 1997: 12-15). As primary sources of inspiration for millions of people worldwide, sacred texts contain profound and enigmatic references to the creation of the universe and the structure of the heavens. The concept of the "Seven Heavens," mentioned repeatedly in the Noble Qur'an, is not merely a cosmological concept but also a term with profound theological and ontological implications, whose understanding can contribute to a more comprehensive grasp of the divine worldview.

Even when the "Seven Heavens" is not interpreted as seven physical layers, its symbolic and theological significance persists, as the number seven in various cultures, including Islamic tradition, signifies perfection, completeness, and grandeur (Burckhardt, 2008: 70-75). Thus, the seven heavens may represent the perfection of divine creation and the numerous levels of existence beyond human sensory perception. However, providing a precise explanation of this concept, distinguishing it from cosmological views prevalent at the time of the Qur'an's revelation, and comparing it with analogous references in the Two Testaments have consistently posed significant challenges in inter-textual and exegetical scholarship. While many traditional interpretations have approached this concept literally, as seven

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physical layers of heaven, contemporary scholarship increasingly explores its symbolic, scientific, and philosophical dimensions (Nasr, 1993: 187-190).

Utilizing a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology, this study examines the concept of the "Seven Heavens" in both the Qur'an and the Two Testaments. The research aims to provide an exegetical analysis of the concept within Islamic texts and to identify points of convergence and divergence with perspectives found in the Jewish-Christian tradition. Drawing on primary Qur'anic, hadith, exegetical, and biblical sources, the study offers a reasoned interpretation of the concept. It contributes to a deeper understanding of divine creation within the broader framework of religious worldviews.

#### **1. Research Background**

Several studies have examined Qur'anic cosmology and compared the Qur'an and Islamic sources with other sacred texts. Among these is Javadi Amoli's "Cosmology in the Qur'an and Hadiths," (2001 AD/1380 SH) which examines the philosophical and mystical dimensions of the concept of the heavens. Likewise, Arefijoo (2019 AD/1398 SH), in an article entitled "Qur'anic Cosmology: An Analysis of Verses Related to the Origin and Transformation of the Material World," comparatively analyzes Qur'anic verses concerning cosmology and the beginning and end of the universe. The study concludes that, because Qur'anic vocabulary has profound layers of meaning, it offers diverse interpretive possibilities across fields, including interpretations informed by human knowledge.

Mostarhami (2008 AD/1387 SH), in a study entitled "The Qur'an and Cosmology," employs the thematic interpretation method to examine

cosmological verses, aiming to apply scientific knowledge to understanding the verses of the Noble Qur'an. After comparing contemporary scientific knowledge with Qur'anic concepts, the study concludes that religion and religious sources do not conflict with established scientific principles and laws in the area under investigation.

Researchers such as Sayyid Hossein Nasr, in "An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines," (Nasr, 1993: 187-200) discuss Islamic cosmological perspectives in detail and address references to the concept of the seven heavens. Similarly, works such as "Cosmology in the Qur'an: A Guide to the Qur'anic Universe" (Rahman, 1989:78-92) have examined Qur'anic verses concerning the creation of the heavens and the earth. In comparative studies, works such as "A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor" (Caner & Caner, 2008: 112-118) address, in general terms, the commonalities and differences among the Abrahamic religions.

Despite existing scholarship, relatively few studies have comparatively examined the concept of the "Seven Heavens" using both the Noble Qur'an and the Two Testaments as primary sources. Addressing this gap may facilitate future research in inter-textually and comparative cosmology.

## **2. Research Methodology and Stages**

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, utilizing descriptive-analytical and comparative approaches. The primary objective is not solely data collection, but rather to achieve a deeper understanding and interpretation of the phenomena under investigation within their respective contexts (Creswell, 2013: 44-48).

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The main stages of the research are as follows: Data collection from Qur'anic verses, Qur'anic commentaries, and texts from the Two Testaments served as the study's primary sources. Books and specialized articles on Islamic cosmology, comparative cosmology, the phenomenology of religion, and comparative theology served as secondary sources; then, analysis and examination; finally, conclusion.

### **3. Theoretical Foundations**

In conducting any research, clarifying and explaining necessary concepts and terms is essential. Because this study's theoretical framework is based on the comparative analysis of sacred texts, with an emphasis on hermeneutics and the phenomenology of religion, it addresses these foundations first. This framework is adopted because understanding the concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the Noble Qur'an and the Two Testaments requires analyzing its semantic layers within the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of each religious tradition (Gadamer, 1989: 290-310).

#### **3.1. Hermeneutics and Interpretation**

Hermeneutics, often called the science of interpretation, exegesis, and interpretation, generally refers to the process of interpreting and explicating a text to arrive at its meaning. In Persian lexicographical sources, it has also been associated with the meanings of "Zand" or "Zand awareness." (Qanbari, 1998 AD/1377 SH) Literary, legal, and religious texts are among the most important types of texts that have attracted hermeneutic scholars' attention (Kia Shemshaki, 2004 AD/1383 SH).

Hermeneutics cannot be fully realized without interpretation. This also applies to the Qur'an. The term "Interpretation" appears in several Qur'anic

verses, all of which are connected to its root, ( 'w-l), which conveys notions of origin, return, and going back to an original point. Verse 7 of Surah *Āli 'Imrān* explicitly addresses the interpretation of divine speech and regards the interpretation of the ambiguous verses as belonging specifically to God, or, according to another interpretation, to God and those firmly grounded in knowledge (*Āli 'Imrān*:7). Various perspectives have been proposed regarding the subject of *interpretation* in relation to Qur'anic verses and what precisely is intended by it.

One of the most precise approaches, and one that is more closely aligned with the present study, is to eliminate the contextual particularities of the original historical circumstances, including temporal and spatial characteristics and the identity of the person or persons involved, through the processes of refinement of the operative cause and the elimination of contextual particularities from the text, and then apply the resulting meaning to contemporary instances, including scientific interpretations and applications to particular individuals or groups. In this way, the statement attributed to the Impeccable Imams (AS) describing the Qur'an as continually in motion, like the sun and the moon (Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 1, 196; Majlisī, 1942 AD/1362 AH: 89, 94), and affirming that it will not perish with the death of the individuals concerning whom particular verses were revealed, is realized. In the same narration, Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) identifies outer dimension and an inner dimension for the Qur'an. By outer dimension, he means its *Tanzīl*, that is, the wording of the Qur'an, while by inner dimension he means its interpretation, or deeper interpretation. The Imam then explains that some of these meanings have already been realized, whereas another part will be realized in the future (ibid.). The generality of Imam *Ṣādiq*'s statement may

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encompass forms of knowledge in various fields, including cosmology, fields that were unknown or only imperfectly understood by human beings during the period of the Qur'an's revelation and for many centuries thereafter, but which humanity has come to understand today.

In light of the foregoing, this study considers Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, which emphasizes the significance of pre-understanding and the horizon of understanding in interpretation. This approach makes it possible, rather than imposing modern meanings on ancient texts, to pursue the meanings intended by the original authors and their contemporary audiences, while also accounting for the potential for new semantic possibilities to emerge (Ricœur, 1976: 80-85).

Beyond hermeneutics, the phenomenological approach to the study of religion is significant for analyzing the concept of the "Seven Heavens." This approach, as developed by scholars in the field, examines religious phenomena without value judgment and seeks to understand the "Sacred" in its various manifestations (Eliade, 1959: 10-15). Within this framework, the "Seven Heavens" is considered both a phenomenon and a symbol of cosmic structure, representing God's power and creativity, with shared and distinct features in Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. This approach enables analysis beyond literal interpretations, allowing for consideration of the concept's symbolic, mythological, and experiential dimensions.

Furthermore, comparative theory in the study of religion, particularly as developed in the works of Friedrich Max Müller, who emphasized the identification of underlying unities and shared patterns across different religions, is considered an important basis for comparing perspectives in the "Qur'an and the Two Testaments." (Müller, 1873: 31-35) The comparative

approach enables researchers to examine not only differences but also similarities and the possibilities of mutual influence or cultural coexistence, thereby contributing to cultural convergence. In fact, the present study seeks to identify a form of "Morphological Kinship" among these concepts within the Abrahamic religions, an issue Lienhardt (1961: 15-20) addressed in his studies of comparative religion.

From the perspective of Qur'anic theology, the concept of the "Seven Heavens" constitutes part of a comprehensive cosmology that emphasizes monotheism and God's absolute power in creation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973: 1, 74-78). This concept encompasses not only the physical dimensions of creation but also metaphysical and symbolic dimensions that point to levels of existence beyond sensory perception. In the Two Testaments, although the "Seven Heavens" are not explicitly mentioned, there are references to multiple heavenly levels and to God's presence in the highest heavens, suggesting a multilayered structure in the upper realm (Strong, 1890: 100-105, entry for "Heaven"). Accordingly, this study's theoretical framework combines hermeneutics, the phenomenology of religion, and comparative studies to arrive at a comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of the concept of the "Seven Heavens" within the context of the Abrahamic religions.

### **3.2. The Two Testaments (the Old Testament and the New Testament)**

As its name suggests, the term the "Two Testaments" encompasses two groups of books; the Old Testament and the New Testament, discussed below.

#### **3.2.1. The Old Testament**

The Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible or the Ancient Testament, is a collection of diverse books that, according to oral traditions,

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were written in several languages over approximately nine centuries and, in some cases, later revised and supplemented. Its origins apparently date back to the eleventh century BCE (cf. Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 20).

Constituting approximately three-quarters of the Bible, the Old Testament comprises 39 books, each with its own title. These include:

The Torah, which is regarded as the principal source of revelation and prophethood associated with Moses. It is said to have been given to him as several separate scrolls and later compiled into a book (Nemati Pir Ali et al., 2015 AD/1394 SH: 86).

The Torah, which forms the foundation of the 39 books of the Old Testament, is arranged in historical sequence and, as the **Pentateuch**, covers the narrative from the origins of the world to the Israelites' entry into Canaan and the death of Moses. The five books are: "Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy."

The other books of the Old Testament contain accounts and writings concerning earlier and later prophets, as well as works such as the Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and others (cf. Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 24).

The Pentateuch traditionally attributed to the words and teachings of Moses, may have taken shape before the tenth century BCE. At the same time, the aforementioned books were later written, supplemented, or revised between the tenth and first centuries BCE, reaching their final form in the first century CE. Since revelation is understood to have become interwoven with all these books, this perspective holds that what remains available today consists not only of the original material but also of material altered or supplemented by

later individuals in response to the circumstances of their own times. It should be noted that, for many centuries, both Judaism and Christianity regarded Moses himself as the author of the Torah (cf. Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 20-24).

### **3.2.2. The New Testament**

The New Testament consists of 27 books, divided into four categories: "The Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of the Apostles, and Revelation."

The Four Gospels, in approximate chronological order of composition, are as follows:

- 1) The Gospel of Matthew: This Gospel is primarily concerned with presenting Jesus as a new Moses, the bearer of a new law, and the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament.
- 2) The Gospel of Mark: This is the shortest of the Gospels and focuses primarily on the deeds and actions of Jesus.
- 3) The Gospel of Luke: This is the longest of the Gospels. Since Luke himself was not an eyewitness to the events he recounts, he emphasizes the universal nature of Jesus' mission and its extension to all peoples.
- 4) The Gospel of John: In presenting Jesus, John goes so far as to refer to him as the Son of God (cf. Nemati Pir Ali et al., 2015 AD/1394 SH: 95-96).

In light of the foregoing, questions concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels and the influence of their authors' perspectives become apparent. Christian sources, however, do not end with these books. The Christian Bible consists of two major sections: the New Testament, discussed above, and the Old Testament.

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Christians refer to these scriptures collectively as the Two Testaments because they believe God has made two covenants with humanity. The first is the Old Covenant, established through the prophets who preceded Jesus, whose addressees were the Children of Israel. The second is the New Covenant, established through the incarnate God, namely Jesus, whose addressees are all human beings. Under the Old Covenant, salvation is attained through promises and warnings, law and religious ordinances, and commands and prohibitions, whereas under the New Covenant, salvation is attained through love. According to this understanding, God the Son became incarnate as a human being, bore humanity's sins, and, by enduring the suffering of the cross, became atonement for their sins.

From the Christian perspective, these two covenants differ: the Old Testament was communicated through verbal revelation, whereas the New Testament was not conveyed through words but proclaimed through the embodiment of an aspect of divinity and its presence among the people (Tofiqi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 168). Consequently, the distinction between the Two Testaments is that the Old Testament contains laws, religious ordinances, commands, and prohibitions, whereas the New Testament does not (ibid: 169). Together, the Old and New Testaments comprise 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

Regarding their authority, both Jews and Christians affirm the sanctity, authority, and divine character of the Old Testament, while Christians also affirm the authority of the New Testament. Christians believe that God produced the sacred books through human authors. Accordingly, they maintain that the sacred scriptures have both a divine author and human authors: God brought the sacred books into existence through the Holy Spirit's

inspiration and inspired human authors to write them (Tofiqi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 173).

Christians believe that, at the beginning of Christianity, only the books of the Old Testament were regarded as divine. Gradually, however, the disciples and followers of Jesus wrote the books of the New Testament, and ecclesiastical councils later granted them divine status (ibid.). Although, according to the explicit statements of the Qur'an, the genuine Gospel, not the corrupted versions, was revealed to Christ (Āli 'Imrān:3-4; al-Mā'idah:46-47; Maryam:30; al-Ḥadīd:27) and differs from the existing Gospels, Christians, unlike Muslims, have never regarded Jesus as having received a book of his own. Rather, they regard the Gospels merely as accounts of his life and sayings (Tofiqi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 175). Consequently, it may be said that they regard the accounts transmitted by the companions of Jesus and their disciples concerning his life and conduct as their sacred scriptures, which were written after him. These writings continued to grow until Christians eventually approved 27 books from among the many writings, including the Four Gospels. Subsequently, the Christian community recognized 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament as the Christian scriptures (Tofiqi, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 176-177).

### **3.3. The Qur'an**

According to the prevailing view, four sources are recognized for understanding Islam: the Qur'an, Sunnah, consensus, and reason in Shi'i thought, or analogy in Sunni thought. The Qur'an is the revealed scripture of Islam, revealed in the Arabic language and consisting of 114 surahs, each of which comprises several verses (Ashrafi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 63). The Qur'an, which is the eternal miracle of the Prophet of Islam and the scripture

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of the final religion, has remained protected from every form of distortion and alteration throughout the centuries. According to verse 44 of Surah *al-Nahl*, alongside Qur'anic revelation, explanatory revelation was also revealed to fulfill the Prophet's explanatory mission and provide the foundation of the Sunnah.

#### **3.4. Cosmology**

Cosmology examines the general laws governing the universe's natural and material evolution. The study of the state and development of galaxies and novae, as well as the expansion of the universe, constitutes among the major subjects of cosmology (Mostarhami, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 41). Human attention to astronomy and cosmology began when people first set foot on earth and turned their gaze toward the heavens. According to transmitted reports, God taught Adam the science of astronomy. According to traditional accounts, other prophets, including the Prophet Daniel, *Idrīs*, and the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), subsequently paid attention to astronomy and cosmology. Scholars of astronomy have divided the historical development of this discipline into three periods: "The geocentric period, the galactic period, and the cosmic period." Much of the work during the cosmic period focused on building a comprehensive picture of the universe using large optical and radio telescopes (*ibid.*).

##### **3.4.1. Modern Cosmological Approaches to Understanding the "Seven Heavens"**

One subject considered in light of advances in modern cosmology is the interpretation of the "Seven Heavens." Given its relevance to the present study, it is briefly discussed here; as familiarity with some of its models may help readers better understand the significance of this inquiry.

#### 3.4.1.1. The Multiverse Model

Some contemporary cosmologists have proposed theories concerning the existence of multiple parallel universes or additional dimensions within the universe (Greene, 2011: 190-200). Although these theories are still in their early stages, they may, in some sense, suggest interpreting the "Seven Heavens" as seven universes or seven distinct dimensions. Such a correspondence, however, must be approached with due caution to avoid imposing meanings upon the sacred text.

#### 3.4.1.2. The Layered Cosmological Model

Some physicists and cosmologists have also discussed the universe's layered structure, such as the layers of the atmosphere or the stratified structure of galaxies and galaxy clusters. This approach may likewise contribute to a more precise understanding of the term "*Ṭibāqan*," (al-Mulk:3; Nūḥ:15) meaning successive layers.

### 4. Discussion and Results: The Seven Heavens in the Noble Qur'an and the Two Testaments

Analyzing the concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the Noble Qur'an and comparing it with references in the Two Testaments requires a deep exploration of the sacred texts' semantic layers and an understanding of their historical and theological contexts. Drawing on the theoretical framework and methodology outlined above, this section analyzes Qur'anic verses and texts from the Two Testaments to identify similarities, differences, and the implications of this cosmological and theological concept. The analysis proceeds along three principal axes: "Examining the concept of the seven heavens in the Noble Qur'an; examining the concept of the heavens in the

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Two Testaments; and conducting a comparative and phenomenological analysis."

#### **4.1. Examination of the Concept of the Seven Heavens in the Noble Qur'an**

The Noble Qur'an repeatedly refers to the creation of the heavens and the earth using various expressions and, in several verses, explicitly mentions the "Seven Heavens." This recurrence highlights the concept's significance within the Qur'anic worldview. In the Qur'an, the term "*Samā'*" is used both in the sense of the "Ceiling Above" and the atmosphere surrounding the earth; in the sense of "Celestial bodies in infinite space" and the unseen and metaphysical realm (Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 240-242). The multiplicity of meanings associated with "*Samā'*" demonstrates the breadth of its semantic range in Qur'anic language, extending from observable natural phenomena to hidden metaphysical realities.

##### **4.1.1. Explicit Verses Concerning the "Seven Heavens"**

The Qur'anic verses that explicitly refer to the "Seven Heavens" include the following:

1. Surah *al-Baqarah*, verse 29: "He is the One who created for you all that is on the earth. Then He turned toward the heaven and fashioned them into seven heavens, and He knows all things."
2. Surah *al-Isrā'*, verse 44: "The seven heavens, the earth, and whoever is in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing except that it glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed, He is Ever-Forbearing, All-Forgiving."

3. Surah *al-Mu'minūn*, verse 17: "And indeed, We created above you seven "*Tarā'iq*" [heavens, each one above another], and We have never been unaware of creation."
4. Surah *al-Mu'minūn*, verse 86: "Say, "Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the Mighty Throne?"
5. Surah *Fuṣṣilat*, verse 12: "So He ordained them as seven heavens in two periods and revealed to each heaven its command. We adorned the lowest heaven with lamps [stars] and protected it [from the devils]. Such is the decree of the Almighty, the All-Knowing."
6. Surah *al-Ṭalāq*, verse 12: "God is He who created seven heavens and likewise of the earth. The divine command descends among them, so that you may know that God is Powerful over all things and that God encompasses all things in knowledge."
7. Surah *al-Mulk*, verse 3: "He is the One who created seven heavens, one above another. You will not see any inconsistency in the creation of the Most Compassionate. Look again: do you see any flaw?"
8. Surah *Nūḥ*, verse 15: "Do you not see how God created seven heavens, one above another?"
9. Surah *al-Naba'*, verse 12: "Have We not made the earth a resting place ... and built above you seven firm heavens?"

Attention to the foregoing verses reveals several points:

1) In the Noble Qur'an, the account of creation is not presented in a single place; rather, it is discussed in a dispersed manner throughout different verses and surahs. The same method applies to various subjects, including the stories of the prophets. Unlike the Two Testaments, which give temporal sequence considerable importance and generally present various subjects, particularly

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narratives, together and in chronological order, the Qur'an often distributes different themes across verses and surahs (Ashrafi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 186).

2) The Qur'anic account of the creation of the universe, and particularly of the seven heavens, may be regarded as an example of the scientific *Ijāz* of the Qur'an. Some scholars address this issue, including the author of *The Qur'an, the Two Testaments, and Science*. Bucaille maintains that the Qur'an contains affirmations concerning major and important scientific matters that are not found in the Two Testaments. In comparison, the Two Testaments likewise contain details that are absent from the Qur'an (cf. Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 182-183).

Nevertheless, although not all subjects presented in the Qur'anic narratives and teachings have thus far been confirmed by scientific data, there is little conflict between the Qur'anic accounts of creation and modern knowledge of the formation and development of the universe. By contrast, the relevant accounts in the Old Testament are scientifically unacceptable. According to Bucaille, the "Divine Text" of the creation narrative in the Two Testaments was written by priests during the Jewish exile in Babylon, who pursued legalistic objectives and constructed those narratives according to their theological views (Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 201-202). Following this discussion, Bucaille concludes that the Qur'an is scientifically miraculous and authentic.

3) The verses concerning the creation of the heavens are not uniform; rather, they present the subject in different ways:

A) Verses 9-12 of Surah *Fuṣṣilat* and verse 29 of Surah *al-Baqarah* state that the number of heavens is seven and that their creation occurred after the creation of the earth. The difference, compared with similar verses, is that the

verses in Surah *Fuṣṣilat* explicitly state that the heavens were created over two days.

**B)** Other verses indicate that there is no explicit chronological sequence between the creation of the heavens and the earth, without mentioning the number of heavens:

"Indeed, your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days ..." (al-A'raf:54)

"A revelation from Him who created the earth and the highest heavens." (Tāhā:4)

In these verses, the creation of the earth is mentioned first, whereas in many other verses the creation of the heavens is mentioned before that of the earth, such

as:

"al-A'raf:54, Hūd:3, al-Furqān:59, al-Sajdah:4, Qāf:38, al-Nāzi'āt:27-33, and al-Shams:5-10."

In fact, apart from verses 27-33 of Surah *al-Nāzi'āt*: "Are you a more difficult creation or the heaven? He built it ... and after that He spread out the earth ..." which explicitly indicates that the earth was created after the heaven, and verses 9-12 of Surah *Fuṣṣilat* and verse 29 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, which explicitly indicate that the heavens were created after the earth, no Qur'anic statement definitively establishes the chronological sequence of their creation (Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 189).

However, an examination of the verses of Surah *al-Nāzi'āt* suggests that the earth existed before the heaven but was later spread out. At the same time, the heaven was initially singular, referred to as *al-Samā'*, rather than plural *al-*

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*Samāwāt*. In other words, as mentioned earlier, the heaven may initially have existed as gas or smoke and had not yet assumed the form of seven heavens.

C) Based on the foregoing, simultaneity between two processes of celestial and terrestrial development, accompanied by an intermingling of phenomena, may be inferred. Therefore, these verses should not be interpreted in a manner that presupposes a contradiction among the Qur'anic accounts (*ibid.*).

D) The number seven in these verses does not necessarily indicate a numerical count of the heavens but rather conveys their multiplicity. Thus, in verse 12 of Surah *al-Ṭalāq*, following the mention of the seven heavens, the Qur'an refers to earths corresponding to them. This may indicate that there is not merely a single earth, the earth inhabited by human beings, but that other similar earths may also exist (cf. Bucaille, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 201-202).

#### **4.1.2. Interpretations of the "Seven Heavens" in Islamic Sources and Works**

Throughout history, Muslim exegetes have adopted different approaches to interpreting the "Seven Heavens," which can be broadly classified into several principal categories:

##### **1) Literal and Material Interpretation**

Some early and later exegetes understood the "Seven Heavens" as seven material and physical layers of celestial bodies and spheres. This view was influenced by Ptolemaic cosmology and Greek astronomy, which described seven celestial spheres associated with the planets, in addition to a sphere of the fixed stars (Mutahhari, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 10, 25-30).

*Zamakhsharī*, in *al-Kashshāf* (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 180-182), and *Fakhr Rāzī*, in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 2, 40-45), refer to this interpretation. However, *Rāzī* adopts a more critical approach

and considers other possible interpretations as well. This perspective remained dominant in Qur'anic exegesis for many centuries.

## 2) Numerical Interpretation (the Number as an Expression of Multiplicity)

Another group of exegetes holds that the number "Seven" in these verses merely signifies multiplicity and plurality rather than an exact numerical count. In other words, God created multiple heavens. The number seven is used to emphasize the abundance and magnificence of creation, similar to the use of this number in Arabic culture as an expression of multiplicity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 1, 28-30). *Shaykh Ṭūsī*, in *al-Tibyān* (Ṭūsī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 1, 130-132), and *Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī*, in *Rawḍ al-Jinān* (Rāzī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 240-245), have referred to this possibility. This view has gained greater acceptance, particularly in light of modern scientific advances, which describe the universe as extending beyond the seven classical celestial spheres.

## 3) Symbolic and Spiritual Interpretation

Some Islamic thinkers, particularly mystics and philosophers, regard the "Seven Heavens" as possessing profound symbolic and spiritual dimensions. According to this view, the seven heavens may be interpreted as seven levels of existence, seven worlds, or seven stages of the spiritual journey and mystical wayfaring (Mutahhari, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 10, 35-40). From a mystical perspective, each heaven may symbolize a particular spiritual state or a stage of proximity to the Divine. *Mullā Ṣadrā*, in *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* (Shīrāzī, 1960 AD/1380 AH: 7, 15-20), refers to these inner dimensions and regards the heavens as levels of existence and realms of the unseen.

## 4) Scientific (Modern) Interpretation

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In the contemporary period, with advances in astronomy and cosmology, some exegetes have attempted to correlate the concept of the "Seven Heavens" with scientific findings. These attempts have sometimes led to interpretations of the seven heavens as the seven planets of the Solar System, seven galaxies, seven layers of the Earth's atmosphere, or even seven parallel universes (Makarem Shirazi et al., 1995 AD/1374 SH: 1, 19-21). This approach, however, has consistently faced challenges, since directly correlating Qur'anic concepts with changing scientific theories may result in interpretation based on personal opinion and the imposition of meanings upon the text. In *al-Mīzān*, Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, while acknowledging the grandeur of creation and noting that the Qur'anic account is not incompatible with scientific knowledge, emphasizes that the Qur'an is not a scientific textbook and that its primary purpose is guidance rather than the instruction of detailed empirical sciences (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 1, 30-32).

#### **4.1.3. Theological and Cosmological Implications**

In addition to the various interpretations discussed above, the concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the Qur'an carries several important implications:

##### **1) The Grandeur and Power of Divine Creation**

This expression portrays the unparalleled grandeur and complexity of God's creation. The orderly, multilayered structure of the heavens testifies to the Creator's infinite power and comprehensive knowledge (al-Mulk:3).

##### **2) Cosmic Order and Coherence**

Qur'anic verses such as "You will not see any inconsistency in the creation of the Most Compassionate" (al-Mulk:3) emphasize the flawless order and harmony present in the structure of the heavens. This order reflects the wise divine will.

**3) Levels of Existence**

The concept of "Seven heavens, one above another" (Nūḥ:15) points to different levels and degrees within existence. These levels may be understood in both physical terms, such as atmospheric layers and galaxies, and metaphysical terms, such as the realms of *Malakūt* and *Jabarūt*.

**4) Divine Sovereignty**

God is the Lord and Sustainer of "The seven heavens and the Mighty Throne" (al-Mu'minūn:86). This indicates His absolute and unrivaled sovereignty over all existence, including the higher realms.

**5) The Realm through Which Divine Command and Revelation Descend**

Some verses, such as *Fuṣṣilat*:12 and *al-Ṭalāq*:12, refer to the descent of divine command and governance among the heavens, indicating the heavens' role as a medium through which the divine will and command are manifested. This interpretive diversity reflects the Qur'an's semantic richness, enabling successive generations to engage with these concepts using the epistemic tools available to them (Naṣr, 1380, pp. 100-105).

**4.2. Examination of the Concept of the Heavens in the Two Testaments**

The Two Testaments (comprising the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*), although they do not explicitly speak of the "Seven Heavens" in the same manner as the Qur'an, contain numerous references to the "Heaven" and the "Heavens," indicating a belief in the existence of multiple layers or levels of heaven. This concept has deep roots in Jewish-Christian apocalyptic, mystical, and Talmudic literature.

**4.2.1. The Concept of "Heaven" in the Old Testament**

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In the *Old Testament*, the Hebrew term "Shamayim" is frequently used in the plural and may refer to the Earth's atmosphere, cosmic space, and also the abode or presence of God (Strong, 1890: 100-105, entry for "Heaven").

#### **4.2.1.1. The Torah**

In the Book of Genesis, the Torah describes the creation as follows: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

Likewise, on the second day of creation, God created the "Firmament" and called it "Heaven"; it separated the waters from the waters (Genesis 1:6-8).

This "Firmament" most likely refers to the Earth's atmosphere.

#### **4.2.1.2. The Psalms**

The Psalms, which constitute part of the Old Testament, are likewise replete with references to the grandeur of the heavens as testimony to the power and glory of God: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands." (Psalm 19:1)

The *Psalms* also refer to the "Heavens of Heavens" (Psalms 68:33; 148:4), suggesting multiple heavenly levels and extending beyond the notion of a single heaven. This expression indicates a hierarchy or multiplicity within the structure of the heavens.

#### **4.2.1.3. Isaiah**

Isaiah, which is also part of the Old Testament, speaks of "New heavens and a new earth." (Isaiah 65:17) This may refer to the renewal of creation or to other realms of existence.

#### **4.2.1.4. Apocalyptic Books**

In Jewish apocalyptic literature circulating between the Old and New Testaments, such as the *"Book of Enoch,"* the concept of "Seven Heavens" or multiple heavens is discussed in considerable detail. For example, the Second

Book of Enoch explicitly describes ten heavens, each with its own inhabitants and distinctive characteristics (Charles, 1913: 425-450, 2 *Enoch* 3-23). Although these texts are not part of the Jewish or Christian canon today, they show how prevalent the concept of multiple heavens was in Jewish culture at the time.

#### **4.2.2. The Concept of "Heaven" in the New Testament**

The New Testament also frequently refers to "Heaven," often presenting it as the abode of God and the angels and as the ultimate destination of the redeemed.

##### **4.2.2.1. The Gospels**

The Gospels likewise contain numerous references to the "Heavenly Father" and the "Kingdom of Heaven," presenting heaven as the divine realm and the domain of God's sovereignty (Matthew 6:9-10).

##### **4.2.2.2. The Book of Revelation**

The *Book of Revelation*, also a New Testament source, is replete with expressions referring to "Heaven" and heavenly events. The book speaks of "A new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), which in fact reflects the same idea expressed in Isaiah (Isaiah 65:17).

##### **4.2.2.3. The Second Epistle to the Corinthians**

The most significant reference to the levels of heaven in the New Testament appears in the *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, where the Apostle Paul refers to his personal experience of being taken up to the "Third Heaven":

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows, was caught up to the third heaven." (2 Corinthians 12:2)

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This statement clearly indicates that, in Paul's understanding, and probably that of his audience as well, there was more than one heaven, and that he had been taken up to the third of them.

#### **4.3. Interpretations of the "Heavens" in the Judeo-Christian Tradition**

The interpretation of the concept of the "Heavens" in the Judeo-Christian tradition, much like in Islam, has been diverse:

##### **4.3.1. Literal Interpretation**

Many early Christian and Jewish theologians regarded the heavens as material, physical layers of the universe above the earth (Augustine, 1991: 67-70, *City of God*, Book XII). Ancient cosmological conceptions also influenced this view.

##### **4.3.2. Hierarchical Interpretation**

The concept of Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12), together with references to multiple heavens in Jewish texts, led to the idea that the heavens possessed a hierarchy and consisted of different levels. This hierarchy was understood as not merely physical but also spiritual, with each level inhabited by particular angels and beings (Philo of Alexandria, 1929: 27-30, *On the Creation*).

##### **4.3.3. Symbolic and Metaphorical Interpretation**

In some interpretations, the heavens have been understood as symbols of spiritual levels, divine perfection, or the particular abode of angels and saints. This approach is especially prominent in Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) and Christian mysticism.

#### **4.4. The Concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the Jewish Tradition**

Although the Two Testaments do not explicitly mention the "Seven Heavens," the concept of seven heavens is discussed in detail in some of their associated texts. For example, in *Hagigah* of the Babylonian Talmud, seven

heavens are mentioned by specific names, such as "Vilon, Raqia, Shehaqim, Zebul, Ma'on, Makhon, and Aravot," each with its own functions and inhabitants.

Mason maintains that the introduction of the concept of the seven heavens into Jewish religious sources, despite the silence of the Old Testament, dates back to the period of the Jewish exile, when the Jews adopted the Babylonians' cosmological views concerning the division of the heavens into seven levels (Mason, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 169). This suggests that the concept of the seven heavens in the Jewish tradition was imported and incorporated later.

#### **4.5. A Comparative Examination of the Concept of the Heavens in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments**

A comparative examination of the concept of the heavens in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments reveals significant convergence and divergence that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of these traditions' worldview.

##### **4.5.1. Commonalities between the Qur'an and the Two Testaments**

The principal points of convergence between the Qur'an and the Two Testaments concerning the heavens are as follows:

##### **4.5.1.1. The Multiplicity and Plurality of the Heavens**

The most important point of convergence between the Two Testaments is the belief in the existence of more than one heaven. Thus, the Qur'an explicitly refers to the "Seven Heavens," while the Old Testament uses the expression "Heaven of Heavens," and the New Testament contains Paul's reference to the "Third Heaven." These expressions clearly indicate the concept of multiple heavens. This multiplicity reflects the grandeur of creation and the

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complexity of the universe, which extends beyond the limited scope of human perception.

#### **4.5.1.2. The Heavens as a Sublime and Divine Realm**

From a phenomenological perspective (Eliade, 1959: 10-15), in both traditions the heavens are at times understood not in their material sense, but rather as higher and sacred levels or realms that stand in contrast to the material and worldly realm and constitute the locus of God's presence and sovereignty, whether understood as Allah or Yahweh, from which His commands are issued. This understanding transforms the heavens from a merely physical phenomenon into a theological concept with sacred dimensions.

#### **4.5.1.3. The Heavens as Manifestations of Divine Glory and Power**

In both the Qur'an and the Two Testaments, the heavens symbolize the Creator's glory, power, and wisdom. The order of the stars, the movement of the celestial bodies, and the boundless expanse of the heavens all testify to the greatness of the Creator.

#### **4.5.1.4. The Stages of the Creation of the Heavens as Part of the Hierarchy of Being**

The statements found in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments, in various ways, indicate a hierarchical structure within the heavens. In the Qur'an, the term "*Ṭibāqan*" (layer upon layer) refers to these levels, while in the Judeo-Christian tradition, ideas such as the "Heaven of Heavens" and the "Third Heaven" likewise point to this concept. These levels may be understood as both physical and spiritual, referring to different degrees of proximity to the Divine (Nasr, 1993: 195-198).

#### **4.5.1.5. The Relationship between Angels and the Heavens**

In the Qur'an and the Two Testaments, heaven also serves as a conduit for revelation and communication between God and humanity, as well as the angels' abode. The descent of revelation, angels, and divine commands from heaven all underscore this function.

#### **4.5.1.6. Commonalities from the Perspective of Comparative Hermeneutics**

From the perspective of comparative hermeneutics, despite their apparent differences, the phenomenon of "Multiple Heavens" in both traditions has shared roots in humanity's understanding of the surrounding world. It requires an explanation of its origin and order. These commonalities show that, when confronted with the grandeur of creation, the human mind tends toward similar ideas, with differences arising mainly in details attributable to cultural and linguistic contexts and the particular emphases of each religious tradition (Ricœur, 1976: 80-85). For example, the Qur'an's emphasis on the number seven may have roots in its symbolism in ancient Middle Eastern cultures, where it signified multiplicity and perfection.

#### **4.5.2. Differences between the Qur'an and the Two Testaments Concerning the Heavens**

Alongside the similarities between the Qur'an and the Two Testaments regarding the heavens, there are also significant differences:

##### **4.5.2.1. Numerical Explicitness**

The most important difference is the Qur'an's explicit specification of the number "Seven" in reference to the heavens, using the expression "Seven Heavens." By contrast, apart from non-canonical Jewish texts such as the *Book of Enoch* and Talmudic literature, which discuss the seven heavens in considerable detail (Charles, 1913: 425-450), the Two Testaments do not

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contain such an explicit numerical designation in their other sources. Rather, references in the Two Testaments to the "Heaven of Heavens" or the "Third Heaven" merely indicate multiplicity without specifying a particular number. This difference may be attributable to the Qur'an's emphasis on the numerical miraculousness of the number seven or to the symbolic significance of this number within the Qur'anic tradition.

#### **4.5.2.2. The Nature of the Heavens**

Although both the Qur'an and the Two Testaments refer to multiple heavens, they differ in their descriptions of their nature. The Qur'an describes the "Lowest Heaven" as adorned with "Stars," (Fuṣṣilat:12) referring to the observable universe, while the other heavens lie beyond sensory perception. In the Two Testaments, references to different heavens sometimes denote layers of the atmosphere and at other times spiritual realms; however, their differentiation and detailed description are less extensive than in the Qur'an.

#### **4.5.2.3. The Heavens as Symbols of Divine Will in Cosmic Order and Governance**

The Qur'an explicitly speaks of the "Governance of the matter" in each heaven (Fuṣṣilat:12; al-Ṭalāq:12), indicating that each heaven possesses its own particular function and system, governed by God. The orderly, layered structure of the heavens symbolizes cosmic order and divine will in establishing an ordered cosmos rather than one characterized by chaos and disorder. For ancient humanity, this order offered reassurance and confidence in a wise Creator. This level of detail is less evident in the Two Testaments.

### **Conclusion**

The comparative and phenomenological analysis of the concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the *Noble Qur'an* and the "Heavens" in the *Two Testaments* reveals that, despite minor differences in expression, both traditions embrace a fundamental conception of a multilayered cosmic structure consisting of multiple levels. This concept encompasses not only the physical dimensions of creation but also, beyond a merely cosmological description, carries profound theological and spiritual implications within the Abrahamic traditions, emphasizing God's grandeur, power, and absolute sovereignty.

The Qur'an's explicit specification of the number seven may be attributed to its emphasis on the miraculous and symbolic dimensions of this number. In contrast, the *Two Testaments* generally avoid such numerical explicitness and instead place greater emphasis on the multiplicity and hierarchy of the heavens.

Accordingly, the perspectives of the Qur'an and the *Two Testaments* concerning the seven heavens may be regarded as sharing the following features:

1. Commonality in the concept of the multiplicity and hierarchy of the heavens: The heavens are understood as being more than one, and their multiplicity signifies different levels and degrees of existence, both physically and spiritually.
2. Commonality in understanding the heavens as a divine realm and manifestation of divine power: The heavens are regarded as the locus of God's presence and absolute sovereignty, the conduit through which revelation descends and cosmic affairs are governed, and a symbol of the wisdom, knowledge, and infinite power of the Creator.

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3. Commonality regarding the symbolic and spiritual significance of the heavens: References to the heavens do not merely denote the vault above humanity or the cosmic expanse; they also symbolize divine transcendence, cosmic order, the degrees of proximity to God, and the abode of spiritual beings (angels). This symbolic dimension has kept these concepts open to interpretation and understanding across the ages and in light of various scientific developments, thereby preserving their vitality and dynamism.
4. Commonality in inviting audiences to contemplate the created world: Both traditions invite their audiences to reflect on the heavens to recognize God's greatness through contemplation of creation.

About the differences between the Qur'an and the *Two Testaments*, particular attention may be given to their differing degrees of numerical explicitness and their interpretive dimensions. The *Noble Qur'an* repeatedly specifies the number "Seven" in relation to the heavens, which may symbolize perfection, completeness, and grandeur. By contrast, the *Two Testaments*, except in non-canonical texts or Talmudic literature, do not directly refer to this number. Rather, they refer to the existence of multiple and layered heavens, including the "Heaven of Heavens" and the "Third Heaven." This difference in detail reflects the two traditions' distinct approaches to articulating cosmic realities, as well as their particular cultural and theological emphases. Nevertheless, their shared belief in the multiplicity of the heavens attests to the convergence of human thought when confronted with the grandeur of creation and to humanity's need to explain the divine's place within the hierarchy of existence.

The concept of the "Seven Heavens" in the Qur'an and the "Heavens" in the *Two Testaments* may be traced to a shared origin in humanity's understanding of the celestial realm and the divine. Despite minor differences in expression, these concepts have consistently served as influential theological and cosmological constructs, shaping the worldviews of their respective religious traditions and continuing to inspire believers and scholars alike.

A phenomenological and hermeneutical approach shows that these concepts' meanings extend beyond physical description, revealing deeper dimensions of reality and the relationship between humanity and the divine. In conclusion, recognizing these commonalities and differences offers a robust foundation for future research in comparative cosmology and for advancing understanding of the worldview within the Abrahamic religions.

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