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A Comparative Study of the Three Characteristics of Angels, Glorification, Impeccability, and the Assigned Rank, in the Qur'an and the Bible

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Abstract

The existence of diverse and seemingly contradictory accounts in the Bible concerning the characteristics of angels, particularly with respect to impeccability and free will, on the one hand, and the coherent and rational portrayal of angels in the Qur'an on the other, necessitates a comparative examination of the three fundamental characteristics of glorification, impeccability, and the assigned rank. The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective in presenting a consistent, rational, and contradiction-free depiction of angels compared with the inconsistencies found in Jewish and Christian scriptures. The study employs a comparative content-analysis method, examining relevant scriptural passages with particular emphasis on the similarities and differences concerning these three characteristics. The principal findings indicate that, in all three Abrahamic religions, angels are charged with glorifying God. However, the Qur'an emphasizes the universality of this glorification, presenting it simultaneously as an essential element in preserving the cosmic order (ontological dimension) and as an act of pure worship (legislative dimension).

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Furthermore, by explicitly affirming the angels' absolute obedience to the divine command and denying any possibility of rebellion, the Qur'an establishes the doctrine of the angels' inherent impeccability. In contrast, the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Apocryphal literature, present narratives of "Fallen Angels" and depict angels as capable of independently violating divine commands, thereby giving rise to significant theological inconsistencies. Likewise, while the Qur'an explicitly affirms that every angel possesses a designated rank and specific responsibilities, the Biblical texts remain ambiguous on this issue. In contrast, the Apocryphal writings introduce inconsistent hierarchical classifications, such as the doctrine of the seven archangels. The study concludes that, unlike the Bible's contradictions regarding angelic impeccability and its ambiguity concerning angelic hierarchy, the Qur'an presents a rational, coherent, and thoroughly monotheistic understanding of angels, offering a clear, intellectually persuasive, and internally consistent doctrine.

Keywords: Angels, Angelic Impeccability, Assigned Rank, Glorification, Qur'an, Bible.

Introduction

Belief in the existence of angels is not exclusive to Islam; rather, it is shared by the followers of other revealed religions and prophets, as well as by many classical philosophers. In many religious traditions, belief in angels and in their active role in governing the order of creation, particularly in religious and spiritual affairs, is regarded as indispensable. Angels are generally associated with sanctity, spirituality, and the performance of acts beyond ordinary human capability; consequently, extraordinary functions are commonly attributed to them.

Within the Abrahamic religions, angels occupy a distinctive theological position, and extensive teachings concerning their nature have been preserved. These traditions, however, often present differing portrayals of

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angelic beings. Consequently, examining their attributes, status, roles, and functions in both the cosmic order and the unfolding of divine revelation is of particular significance, especially since belief in angels constitutes an essential element of faith in the Abrahamic traditions, particularly in Islam. Given the necessity of belief in angels, an important question arises: 'What is the scope of the concepts of glorification, impeccability, and assigned rank with respect to angels, and how does the Qur'anic understanding differ from that presented in the Bible?' Both the Qur'an and the Bible describe various functions and hierarchical ranks for angels. Conversely, Satan and his hosts are likewise assigned distinct characteristics and functions that are defined in opposition to those of the angels. It is therefore essential to undertake a systematic comparative analysis of these subjects in both scriptures and to identify the sounder conception of angels according to three fundamental criteria: "The internal coherence of the text; consistency with the principle of monotheism and the attributes of God, such as His wisdom and omniscience; and rational coherence." The absence of a comprehensive comparative study devoted specifically to these issues underscores the necessity of the present research.

Proceeding from the premise that the Qur'an possesses authority and supremacy over previous scriptures and contains the definitive truth concerning angels, this study examines the relevant themes, identifies the areas of convergence and divergence between the Qur'an and the Bible, and ultimately demonstrates the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective.

1. Literature Review

The subject of angels has been discussed extensively in a wide range of scholarly works, including independent books and journal articles, as well as in exegetical and theological writings. Among these studies, several are particularly relevant to the present research and merit attention according to their significance and thematic proximity.

One of the most comprehensive works in this field is *The Functions of Angels in the Qur'an and the Old and New Testaments*, authored by Rokhsaneh Danesh (Qom: Research Department of al-Zahra University, 2019 AD/1398 SH). This volume examines topics such as the categories, attributes, and legislative and cosmic functions of angels in the Qur'an; their categories, attributes, and functions in the Old and New Testaments; and a comparative analysis of the legislative and cosmic roles of angels in these scriptures. The present article differs from this work in three principal respects: "First, it concentrates specifically on the three foundational characteristics of glorification, impeccability, and assigned rank; second, it adopts a comparative analytical methodology aimed at demonstrating the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective; and third, it incorporates the Apocryphal writings and the Talmud as supplementary sources alongside the Biblical texts." By contrast, Danesh's work focuses primarily on the functions of angels. The study most closely related to the present research is the article "The Role and Status of the Governing Angels in the Old and New Testaments" by Sayyid Hisam al-Din Hosseini (*Journal of Comparative Theology*, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2, 13-115). This article approaches the subject from a theological perspective, seeking to explain the governing role of angels in the Biblical tradition and to demonstrate how belief in angels shapes the worldview of those who adhere to the Old and New Testaments.

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Another article by the same author, "The Role of Governing Angels in the Qur'an and the Old and New Testaments" (Journal of Religions and Mysticism, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 2, 11-38), examines the views of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish scholars before discussing how angels assist believers in building a superior religious, moral, and humane society. The present study differs from both of these articles in that, rather than focusing on the angels' governing role; it concentrates exclusively on the three distinctive characteristics of glorification, impeccability, and assigned rank, while also drawing upon the Apocryphal writings.

In addition, the article "An Examination of the Nature of Angels from the Perspective of the Divine Religions" by Marzieh Khaza'ali (Journal of Religions and Mysticism, 2016 AD/1395 SH) investigates the ontology of angels. Still, it does not address the three characteristics examined in the present study, particularly the concept of the assigned rank, and its comparative dimension is relatively limited.

Similarly, the article "A Comparative Study of the Image of Angels in Islam and the Fravashis in the Avesta" by Rezazadeh et al. (Comparative Studies of Religions, 2017 AD/1397 SH) adopts an interreligious approach. Still, it does not examine Jewish and Christian sources, thereby differing substantially from the present research.

The article "The Impeccability of Angels: Supporting and Opposing Evidence" by Rastin and Kohansal (Theological Studies, 2020 AD/1399 SH) is confined solely to the issue of angelic impeccability and does not offer a

comparative analysis of the Qur'an and the Bible with respect to the three characteristics considered here.

The novelty of the present article lies in its examination of these three fundamental characteristics of angels in light of the Qur'anic verses, the Old and New Testaments, and related sources, including Islamic traditions and the Apocryphal writings. Its objective is to demonstrate the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective over that of the Biblical texts regarding angels according to the three criteria identified above. Furthermore, by analyzing these three characteristics, the study seeks to clarify the common theological foundations shared by the Abrahamic religions concerning angels while exposing the inconsistencies and contradictions found within Jewish and Christian sources. As noted earlier, there remains a clear gap in comparative scholarship devoted specifically to these three foundational characteristics of angels with the explicit aim of demonstrating the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective. The present article is intended to fill that gap.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Lexical Meaning of Angel

The Persian word "Fereshteh," (angel) also known as "Soroush," corresponds to the Arabic and Qur'anic term "*Malak*." Its English equivalent is "Angel," (Akbari et al., 1991 AD/1370 SH: 428, 594) which derives from the Greek word "Angelos." The original root of this term in Hebrew, Greek, and Syriac carries the meaning of "Messenger." On this basis, most philologists maintain that "*Malak*" is derived from "*Alūk*," meaning "Message" or "Mission." (Ibn Fāris, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 102)

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Azharī, quoting *Kisā'ī*, explains that the original form was "*Ma'lak*," following the morphological pattern "*Maf'al*," and derived from "*Alūk*" in the sense of "*Message*." Subsequently, the letter "*Lām*" replaced the "*Hamzah*," producing the form "*Mal'ak*"; with frequent usage, the "*Hamzah*" was omitted, yielding the familiar form "*Malak*." When pluralized, however, the "*Hamzah*" reappears in the form "*Malā'ikah*." (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 5, 380; Ibn Manẓūr, 1996: 1, 392-393)

Ṭabrisī, however, citing *Ibn Kaysān*, argues that the word is derived directly from "*Mulk*," making the letter "*Mīm*" an original rather than an additional letter (Qarashī, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 6, 276). In any case, some lexicographers regard "*Malak*" as a shortened form of "*Mal'ak*," (Ibn Manẓūr, 1996: 10, 392) with "*Malā'ikah*" as its plural (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 5, 380; *Ṭabrisī*, *ibid*: 1, 175-176). Although this explanation is not entirely compatible with the derivation from "*Alūk*," the disagreement concerning its etymology remains unresolved.

Terminologically, angels are celestial, immaterial, spiritual, and heavenly beings devoted to glorifying God and carrying out His commands in both the realms of creation and divine command, serving as intermediaries between God and His creatures. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* defines angels as: "Noble and honored beings who serve as intermediaries between God and the sensible world. There is no event, whether major or minor, in which angels do not play a role... They are beings purified from corporeal matter, which is subject to destruction, corruption, change, and gradual perfection." (*Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 17, 12-13)

According to Avicenna, the subtle, imperceptible powers referred to in the language of revelation are designated as angels (Avicenna, 1947 AD/1326 SH: 132). Islamic philosophers likewise maintain that angels are intellects entirely immaterial, perpetually absorbed in the contemplation of God. They possess no independent creative power, obey God without disobedience or deviation, and administer the affairs of the universe precisely in accordance with the divine decree (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981: 8, 118, 125; Sajjadi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 471).

In the Bible, both the term and concept of angel are employed in literal as well as figurative senses. In its literal usage, it refers to holy spiritual beings that stand in God's presence, execute His commands, and convey His messages. In its figurative or metaphorical sense, however, the word is sometimes applied to human messengers (1 Samuel 11:3; Luke 7:24; 9:52), God's human messengers such as the prophets (Isaiah 42:19; Haggai 1:13; Malachi 3:1), and even priests (Malachi 2:7). Moreover, in the poetic literature of the Bible, natural forces such as winds and flames are described as God's "Messengers," which some commentators associate with angels (Psalm 104:4).

Beyond these lexical usages, prophetic visions also portray celestial beings through symbolic animal imagery. Within the Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions, these beings are generally regarded as categories of angels. For example, the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision, beholds four living creatures with the faces of a human being, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:4-28). The Bible itself later identifies these beings explicitly as cherubim: "Then I knew that they were cherubim." (Ezekiel 10:20)

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These cherubim were appointed to guard the Tree of Life, preventing anyone from reaching it (Genesis 3:24; Halley, 1995: 322).

2.2. The Necessity of Belief in Angels

In the Qur'an, belief in angels is placed alongside belief in God, His revealed books, and His messengers: "The Messenger has believed in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so have the believers. All of them believe in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers." (al-Baqarah: 285)

Likewise, the Qur'an states: "Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but true righteousness is to believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets." (al-Baqarah: 177)

Thus, belief in angels is ranked alongside belief in the Hereafter, the revealed scriptures, and the prophets. The significance of this belief stems from the angels' continual and indispensable role in the governance of the universe. Indeed, enmity toward them is equated with enmity toward God and His messengers: "...Whoever is an enemy to God, His angels, His messengers, Gabriel, and Michael, then indeed God is an enemy to the disbelievers." (al-Baqarah: 97-98)

Since angels serve as intermediaries between God and His prophets, conveying divine revelation and transmitting His messages by His permission, belief in them constitutes an essential doctrine of Islam and an indispensable prerequisite for belief in the heavenly scriptures.

Belief in angels also constitutes a fundamental doctrine in the Talmud (Darwish, 2008: 136). Nevertheless, this corpus contains numerous extraordinary and implausible accounts concerning angels (Zarqā', ١٧٨٩

AD/1199 AH: 89; Mehran, 1999: 3, 360; Zafar al-Islam Khan, 1990 AD/1369 SH: 79-80). Likewise, the Deuterocanonical (Apocryphal) books discuss angels in even greater detail, often embellishing these accounts with legendary and exaggerated narratives (Darwish, 2008: 105-108, 130-159).

3. The Three Fundamental Characteristics of Angels in the Qur'an and the Bible

The Qur'an attributes three fundamental characteristics to angels:

- 1) They never grow weary of worship, nor do they cease glorifying God day and night (al-Anbīyā': 19-20; al-A'rāf: 206; al-Baqarah: 30; al-Şāffāt: 165; al-Anbīyā': 26);
- 2) They never disobey the divine commands (al-Taḥrīm: 6; al-Anbīyā': 27);
- 3) Each possesses a designated rank and station (al-Şāffāt: 164).

By contrast, the Bible presents two apparently inconsistent portrayals of angels. On the one hand, angels are described as divine beings and ministering spirits who faithfully carry out God's commands (Psalm 103:20-21). On the other hand, they are portrayed as agents who, exercising their own discretion, modify or depart from divine instructions (Genesis 19:17-22). From the standpoint of internal textual consistency, these two portrayals are difficult to reconcile. They also conflict with the Qur'anic depiction of angels as beings who never rebel against God, possess no independent authority in executing His commands, and each occupy a divinely assigned station. Furthermore, the Qur'anic portrayal of angelic glorification, impeccability, and designated rank exhibits a far greater degree of coherence with the doctrine of absolute monotheism.

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3.1. The Glorification of Angels

The Qur'an explicitly states that angels glorify God. The first occurrence appears in the account of Adam's creation and God's appointment of him as vicegerent on earth, where the angels declare: "While we glorify You with praise and sanctify You." (al-Baqarah: 30)

Another verse specifically refers to the angels who bear the Divine Throne: "Those who bear the Throne and those around it glorify their Lord with praise." (al-Ghāfir: 7)

Other Qur'anic verses affirm that all creation glorifies God, a statement that naturally includes the angels: "The seven heavens, the earth, and all that is in them glorify Him. There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise, though you do not understand their glorification." (al-Isrā': 46; see also al-Ḥadīd: 1; al-Ḥashr: 1; al-Ṣaff: 1)

According to the explicit testimony of the Qur'an and Islamic traditions, all creatures, including the angels, possess consciousness and awareness and glorify God (Ṭayyib, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 7, 317; 8, 259-260; 9, 280). Their glorification is understood in both ontological and prescriptive senses. It is ontological because every creature fulfills its divinely ordained function in an orderly manner (al-Ra'd: 13; al-Ḥajj: 18), thereby preserving the harmony of the cosmos. This orderly functioning itself constitutes an act of glorification and a declaration of God's transcendence as Creator and Sustainer (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 17, 13; Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 26, 187). It is also prescriptive because certain angels were created exclusively for the worship of God, and their worship consists precisely in His continual

glorification.

The Bible likewise refers to angels singing hymns in heaven and never growing weary of their praise (Halley, n.d.: 229). The Psalms both describe and command the angels' praise of God: "Praise the Lord, you His mighty angels, who obey His word and carry out His commands!" (Psalm 103:20; cf. Psalm 29:1)

Elsewhere, all the heavenly hosts are summoned, together with the angels, to praise the Lord (Psalm 148:2). The Book of Revelation likewise depicts angels singing hymns of praise. The Talmud further relates that God creates a new company of angels each day; they sing hymns and glorify Him in His presence before returning to the river of fire from which they were created (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 119).

3.2. The Impeccability of Angels and Its Evidences

Lexically, impeccability means "To restrain," "To protect," or "To preserve." (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 1, 313; Ibn Manẓūr, 1996: 12, 404; Jawharī, n.d.: 5, 1986-1987; Zabīdī, n.d.: 17, 481-482; Muṣṭafawī, n.d.: 8, 153) Technically, it denotes the strongest inner motive for obeying God and the most powerful deterrent against sin and error (Shariati, 1966 AD/1346 SH: 66).

As indicated by the explicit wording of the Qur'an, affirmed by Muslim scholars, and supported by the lexical meaning of impeccable Imam (one who is protected from committing sin), impeccability signifies that God grants a servant a special grace and protection. Whenever the conditions conducive to sin arise, He grants the servant the success to exercise self-restraint. Should the servant err inadvertently or out of forgetfulness, God guides him back to the truth and removes the mistake (Shaiati, 1966 AD/1346 SH: 66).

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Although the expression describing angels as "Stern and Mighty" appears specifically with reference to the guardians of Hell, when interpreted alongside other verses, particularly al-Anbīyā': 26-27, its implication extends to all angels, thereby establishing their universal impeccability rather than restricting it to a particular group (cf. Javadi Amoli, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 3, 299-300).

This raises several important questions. Do angels possess the capacity to sin but voluntarily refrain from doing so? Or is their nature entirely one-dimensional, rendering them incapable of sin, so that their obedience is necessary rather than freely chosen? Does the phrase "They do not disobey God in what He commands them" apply exclusively to the angels entrusted with Hell, those described as "Stern and Mighty," or does it encompass all angels? In other words, are all divine angels infallible, or only the guardians of Hell who execute God's commands without alteration, negligence, or personal discretion?

Scholars have expressed differing opinions on this issue. Some maintain that the Qur'anic evidence for angelic impeccability pertains solely to the guardians of Hell and therefore cannot be generalized to all angels. A more persuasive interpretation, however, is that the Qur'anic description: "Rather, they are honored servants. They do not precede Him in speech, and they act only according to His command," (al-Anbīyā': 26-27), is universal in scope and includes all angels (Javadi Amoli, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 3, 299-300). The evidence for the universal impeccability of angels is examined below.

3.2.1. The General Scope of the Verses "They Do Not Disobey God" and "Honored Servants"

The verse, "Over it are angels, stern and mighty...", (al-Taḥrīm: 6) describes a group of angels by two qualifications: that they are appointed over Hell (over it) and that they are "Stern and Mighty." However, the verse is not expressed in restrictive language; therefore, it does not exclude other angels from sharing the same characteristic. The affirmation of a quality for one group does not negate its existence in others. Otherwise, an independent proof would be required to establish the impeccability of the remaining angels. Such proof is available, not only through rational arguments and authentic traditions,¹ but also through the verse, "They do not disobey God in what He commands them...", (al-Taḥrīm: 6) together with the passages concerning angels in al-Anbīyā': 26-29, whose wording conveys general applicability. These verses collectively establish the impeccability of all angels.

The statement, "They do not precede Him in speech, and they act only according to His command," (al-Anbīyā': 27) implies that angels possess the capacity to act but never choose to disobey. This is further supported by the warning: "Whoever among them were to say, "Indeed, I am a god besides Him," We would recompense him with Hell..." (al-Anbīyā': 29)

The very existence of this conditional warning indicates that such a claim is theoretically conceivable, yet it never occurs in reality because of the angels' impeccability. Likewise, another verse emphasizes that angels never act

¹. "Narrations that, in addition to possessing a continuous and authentic chain of transmission, possess content consistent with the texts and apparent meanings of the Qur'an and definitive narrations supported by corroborating evidences, and which sound reason does not object to accepting."

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arrogantly before God, thereby affirming their complete obedience and impeccability (al-Nahl: 49-50).

3.2.2. The Universality of the Angels' Designated Rank

The verse concerning the angels' designated station likewise demonstrates the universal impeccability of angels. The verse records the angels declaring that each of them has a specific station assigned by God, from which none ever departs.

Some exegetes interpret this "Designated Station" as each angel's appointed sphere of worship. Accordingly, every duty assigned to an angel constitutes obedience to God and is itself an act of worship. Thus, the concept of designated station is universal and encompasses all angels.

Consequently, not only are the stern angels entrusted with Hell infallible and incapable of disobedience, but all angels are infallible, since every one of them possesses a divinely assigned station and remains steadfast within it in perpetual worship, never transgressing its limits.

3.2.3. Satan's Inability to Influence God's Chosen Servants

Another proof of angelic impeccability is Satan's acknowledged inability to influence God's sincere servants. Satan himself declares: "By Your might, I shall surely mislead them all, except Your sincere servants among them." (Şād: 82-83; cf. al-Hijr: 39-40)

According to these verses, Satan has absolutely no authority over God's purified servants. This exception is not merely legislative but ontological: because of their exalted spiritual station in relation to monotheism, Satan lacks the power to influence them. His inability stems from his own weakness

and incapacity to reach that level of spiritual perfection. Thus, from the outset Satan openly acknowledges his helplessness before this class of servants (Hosseini Tehrani, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 44).

Since the Qur'an describes the angels as "Honored Servants," they belong to this category of God's sincere servants over whom Satan has no authority. Consequently, they are protected from both satanic temptation and disobedience to God.

3.2.4. Divine Election for the Mission of Messengership

The divine selection of angels as God's messengers also serves as evidence of their impeccability. Those chosen to convey divine messages must necessarily be trustworthy and must faithfully execute the mission entrusted to them. Just as human beings selected for prophethood are infallible and protected from error, the same principle applies to angelic messengers.

The Qur'an states: "God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among humankind." (al-Hajj: 75)

The term "*Iṣṭifā*" (choosing or electing) literally signifies selecting the purest and finest part of something (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1992: 489). Accordingly, God's election of messengers from among angels and human beings means that He selects only those who are purified, sincere, and fully qualified for the office of divine messengership (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 14, 409).

3.2.5. The Necessity of Impeccability for Divine Messengers

Furthermore, the very concept of divine messengership necessarily entails impeccability. Reason dictates that it is incumbent upon the All-Wise God to appoint only infallible messengers so that those who receive their messages may have complete confidence in the authenticity of what is conveyed. Accordingly, the description of angels as messengers in the verse, "[God is]

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the One who appoints the angels as messengers..., " (al-Fāṭir: 1) when considered together with the definite article (al-) in "*al-Malā'ikah*," encompasses the entire class of angels. Since the office of divine messengership is inherently incompatible with disobedience, it follows that all angels are infallible.

Otherwise, one would have to accept the Biblical portrayal embraced by some People of the Book, according to which angels failed to carry out God's commands exactly as instructed and instead altered them according to their own judgment (Genesis 19:17–22). Likewise, some among the People of the Book believed that the Angel Gabriel mistakenly delivered God's message to Ishmael rather than Isaac, thereby transferring prophethood to the descendants of Ishmael instead of those of Isaac (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 3, 611). Muslim exegetes have understood this claim as part of a broader attempt to deny the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) (ibid.).

3.2.6. The Incompatibility of the Israelite Narratives of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* with Rational Coherence

The account of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* (al-Baqarah: 102) has attracted considerable attention among storytellers and legendary narrators. Numerous reports recount this episode in a highly mythical manner and are generally classified as Israelite traditions. These narratives closely resemble Jewish apocryphal accounts describing the sins allegedly committed by angels (Darwish, 2008: 114-115). The Dead Sea Scrolls likewise contain traditions attributing sin to angels after they became captivated by the beauty of human women (ibid.).

Many traditional Sunni commentaries, including *Jāmi' al-Bayān* (Ṭabarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 1, 362-367), *al-Durr al-Manthūr* (Suyūṭī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 1, 96-103), and *Kashf al-Asrār* (Maybudī, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 1, 295), as well as several Shi'i narrative commentaries, such as *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* (1960 AD/1380 AH: 1, 141), transmit these stories with minor variations. Most of these reports ultimately derive from *Ka'b al-Aḥbār* through *'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar*, and storytellers sometimes even attributed them directly to the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). Some scholars reproduced these legendary narratives without evaluating their authenticity, rejecting and not endorsing them. However, both Shi'i exegetes (e.g., Ṭūsī, n.d.: 1, 384; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 1, 238-241) and Sunni scholars (e.g., Ibn Jawzī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 1, 123-125; Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 1, 243) explicitly rejected these reports after citing them, emphasizing their incompatibility with Islamic teachings.

After quoting one such report from *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī remarks: "This is a superstitious tale that attributes to the honored angels acts from which the Qur'an explicitly declares them to be free, including polytheism, murder, adultery, and wine drinking." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 1, 239)

Similarly, *Abū Shahbah* discusses these reports at length: "Everything narrated on this subject, besides contradicting the doctrine of the angels' impeccability, belongs to the fabrications of the *Isrā'īliyyāt* introduced into Qur'anic exegesis through *Ka'b al-Aḥbār* and his followers. Although some regarded these reports as authentic, authenticity requires that a report not contradict the unequivocal principles of the Sharī'ah." (Abū Shahbah, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 159-166)

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Accordingly, the claim that certain angels committed acts of disobedience cannot be accepted, since it contradicts the clear meaning of the Qur'anic descriptions "Honored Servants" and "They do not disobey God in what He commands them, but do whatever they are commanded." At most, if such reports were to be interpreted, they could only be understood as referring to leaving what is preferable, not to actual sin (Ṭayyib, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 1, 511).

From the perspective of rational coherence, attributing sin to the angels nearest to God is incompatible with divine wisdom in selecting His messengers.

3.2.7. The Inconsistency of the Doctrine of Fallen Angels with the Divine Attributes

Contrary to the Qur'an's explicit affirmation of the impeccability of angels, the Bible and certain Jewish traditions present two mutually contradictory portrayals of angels:

- Angels are not infallible and may independently alter or disregard divine commands.
- Angels are perfectly obedient servants of God who never sin.

According to the first portrayal, angels possess the freedom to modify God's commands and do not necessarily execute them exactly as instructed. For example, Jewish tradition claims that Gabriel mistakenly delivered the divine message to someone other than its intended recipient; consequently, some Jews regarded him as their enemy. The Qur'an alludes to this belief: "Say, whoever is an enemy to Gabriel..." (al-Baqarah: 97-98)

Similarly, the two angels who appeared to Lot allegedly postponed or altered the destruction of the city in response to Lot's request, despite having been commanded to destroy it (Genesis 19:17-22).

Even the Book of Job compares the impurity of human beings with that of angels in order to emphasize human frailty: "Can mortal man be more righteous than God? ... Even His angels He charges with error." (Job 4:17-18; cf. 15:14-16).

The Talmud likewise does not regard angels as free from sin. It even states that angels envy the Jewish people; therefore, Jews are instructed to pray only in Hebrew because, apart from Gabriel, the angels do not understand other languages, thereby preventing jealousy among them (Zarqā', 1199: 89).

In the non-canonical Jewish writings, there are accounts of sinful or rebellious angels, specifically two hundred angels, who became enamored with the beauty of human women (the daughters of Cain), descended openly to earth, and fathered the race of giants (Nephilim or Amalekites), who spread corruption throughout the world before eventually being punished by the higher-ranking angels (Darwish, 2008: 107-116).

During the first century CE, certain Christian groups propagated the belief that angels were also capable of sin (cf. Jude 6). According to this view, sinful angels are responsible for many evils and calamities on earth. Some even serve Satan, and the Book of Revelation refers to them as evil angels (Revelation 12:7-9).

By contrast, the following biblical passage clearly portrays all angels, not merely some of them, as completely obedient to God. Obedience is described as their very nature, rendering them incapable of sin:

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"Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding and obey His word! Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who do His will! ... Praise the Lord, all His works, everywhere in His dominion." (Psalm 103:20-21; cf. Psalm 148:2)

Ironically, however, the Talmud also depicts angels as beings who are immune to evil inclinations and are therefore free from human passions and desires. It further states that should any group of angels oppose the divine will, God destroys them (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 118).

This dual and contradictory depiction of angels, affirming both their impeccability and their fallibility, constitutes one of the major theological tensions within the biblical tradition and represents a clear violation of the criterion of internal textual consistency.

Moreover, accepting the existence of sinful angels conflicts with the second evaluative criterion, namely consistency with the attributes of God. A perfectly wise God would not choose fallible beings as intermediaries for conveying His revelation.

The Qur'an, by contrast, presents a unified and coherent doctrine of angelic impeccability in which the very possibility of sin or error on the part of angels is inconceivable. Consequently, the Qur'anic portrayal is internally consistent and fully compatible with the divine attributes.

3.2.8. The Inconsistency¹ of the Doctrine of Fallen Angels with Angelic Impeccability

The biblical doctrine of fallen angels is fundamentally based on the premise that angels are not infallible. This stands in direct contrast to the Qur'an, which explicitly states that angels never disobey God and unfailingly carry out whatever He commands.

In the New Testament, alongside the holy angels of light, there appear fallen angels, who are identified with demons. These beings deceitfully disguise themselves as angels of light. Just as Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, so too can his servants assume the appearance of righteous messengers. Referring to false apostles and deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, Paul writes: "For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Earlier, the Deuterocanonical and related Jewish writings had already described rebellious and sinful angels, tracing the origin of their first sin to the era of Noah, when they became captivated by the beauty of earthly women (Darwish, 2008: 105-114; The Torah: Inter-testamental Writings, 1998: 2, 31-32).

¹. It is necessary to recall that, from the perspective of Jewish and Christian intra-religious (internal) scholarship, researchers and commentators of the Bible, relying on exegetical rules, return the ambiguous passages concerning angels in the Scripture to their clear/homogeneous ones, thereby resolving apparent contradictions. Hence, what is at issue in this article is not a discussion of the 'possibility of allegorical interpretation per se, but rather a comparison of the structure of the two texts, the Holy Qur'an and the Bible, in presenting a coherent or incoherent image of angels.

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Likewise, the Book of Genesis refers to the "Sons of God"¹ (Comparative Commentary on the Bible, p. 39), who married the daughters of men during the time of Noah. Their offspring were mighty giants whose wickedness paved the way for the Flood (Genesis 6:4-7).

According to some biblical commentators, the expression "Sons of God" refers to angels who rebelled against God's command (The Living Bible, 1995: 5, note 2). Other biblical scholars suggest that this passage may allude to the time when Satan led several angels in rebellion against God (Halley, n.d.: 737). Still others reject any angelic interpretation altogether, maintaining that the phrase refers instead to the descendants of Seth (Comparative Commentary on the Bible, 2004, p. 39).

As is evident, the accounts found in the Israelite tradition are fundamentally inconsistent with the Qur'an's explicit affirmation of the impeccability and nobility of the angels. In these traditions, sinful angels are punished in a dreadful place within Hell, which serves as their eternal prison (The Torah: Intertestamental Writings, 1998: 2, 39-40, 70, 91-92).

3.3. The Established Rank of the Angels

Drawing together the Qur'anic verses concerning the angels (al-Ṣāffāt: 164; al-Takwīr: 21; Saba': 22), Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains the concept of the angels' established rank as follows: "Despite their great number, the angels possess different ranks in terms of superiority and inferiority. Some are above

¹. The authors of the Samaritan Torah have used the expression "Banu al-Salatin" (sons of the rulers/dominions) (*al-Tawrah al-Samariyyah*, 1978: 42), and Saadia Gaon has used the expression "Banu al-Ashraf" (sons of the nobles) (Gaon, 2015: 92).

others, and some command those beneath them, while the latter obey and carry out their orders."

He further adds: "Those who command do so only by God's command, serving as bearers of His command to those entrusted with its execution, and those commanded obey only by God's instruction. Consequently, the angels possess absolutely no independent authority of their own." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 17, 13)

The Qur'an assigns a wide range of significant and diverse duties to the angels, all of which they perform by divine commission. These responsibilities directly reflect the three defining characteristics of angels discussed in this study. None of them ever deviates from its assigned duty; rather, each angel occupies a fixed and predetermined station and faithfully fulfills the responsibilities entrusted to it: "There is none among us except that he has a known station. And indeed, it is we who stand in ranks." (al-Ṣāffāt: 164-165)

Among the numerous duties assigned to the angels are:

- Conveying divine messages (Fāṭir: 1);
- Descending on the Night of Decree to execute God's decrees (al-Qadr: 4);
- Taking human souls and questioning them after death (al-Naḥl: 28);
- Interceding for believers (al-Anbiyā': 28);
- Bringing glad tidings to dying believers (al-Fuṣṣilat: 30);
- Striking the faces and backs of dying disbelievers (Muḥammad: 27);
- Greeting the righteous in Paradise with peace (al-Zumar: 73);

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- Seeking forgiveness for the inhabitants of the earth (al-Shūrā: 5);
- Bearing witness on the Day of Resurrection (Qāf: 21);
- Glorifying God; and many other divinely assigned functions. These diverse responsibilities distinguish the angels into different categories.

On this basis, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, in *Maḥāṭih al-Ghayb*, classifies the angels into eight principal groups:

- the bearers of the Divine Throne (Ghāfir: 7; al-Hāqqah: 17);
- the angels surrounding the Throne (al-Zumar: 75);
- the great archangels, including Gabriel and Michael (al-Baqarah: 98);
- the angels of Paradise (al-Ra'd: 24);
- the guardians of Hell (al-Muddathir: 27-31; al-Ra'd: 23-24; al-Zukhruf: 77);
- the angels appointed over human beings (Qāf: 18; al-Ra'd: 11; al-An'ām: 61);
- the recording angels who document human deeds (al-Infiṭār: 10-12; Qāf: 17-18; Yūnus: 21);
- the angels entrusted with administering the affairs of the created world (al-Ṣāffāt: 1-3; al-Nāzi'āt: 1-5) (*Mullā Ṣadrā*, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 346-348).

The Bible likewise classifies angels into various orders, including principalities, powers, authorities, and dominions. Angels are frequently

portrayed as governing certain impersonal forces of nature (Halley, n.d.: 445). Scripture also attributes numerous functions to them. The Old Testament records twenty-two distinct angelic activities. In the New Testament, where the terms angel and angels occur much more frequently than in the Old Testament, a variety of additional functions are assigned to them. Angels intervene in the life of Jesus on nine separate occasions, and Jesus Himself refers to twenty-two distinct angelic functions. In the Book of Acts, angels typically perform similar roles, such as punishing, liberating, and guiding particular individuals. In the Epistles and the Book of Revelation, angels appear both in their literal sense and as symbolic figures (Halley, n.d.: 443-446).

The Talmud likewise states that angels are assigned specific responsibilities (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 118; Mehran, 1999: 3, 361) and occupy different hierarchical ranks. *Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī*, the Karaite scholar of the early tenth century, describes four principal characteristics of angels:

- they are confined to the heavenly realm;
- they do not die, yet they possess intelligence comparable to that of human beings and communicate through speech;
- they are free from the need for nourishment;
- they are capable of performing miracles (Cohen–Sharbak, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 89).

The introduction to the Book of Tobit, one of the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, similarly states that angels serve as executors of the divine will and that numerous angels have been designated and appointed to oversee different tasks (cf. Later Canonical Books, n.d.: 79).

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In contrast, the Qur'an explicitly affirms that every angel entrusted with a particular duty performs only that assigned responsibility, in accordance with the declaration: "There is none among us except that he has a known station." Each angel thus occupies a definite, fixed, and predetermined place within the cosmic order.

Likewise, in Islamic philosophy and mysticism, every created being, including the supreme angels who stand in ordered ranks and the governing angels entrusted with administering the universe, occupies a precisely determined station. A well-known tradition states that some angels remain perpetually in bowing and never prostrate. In contrast, others remain perpetually in prostration and never bow (al-Sayyid Raḍī, n.d.: Sermon 1). This narration indicates that angels are incapable of exceeding the station assigned to them (Khomeini, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 214-215). Accordingly, it may be concluded that both Qur'anic declarations, "There is none among us except that he has a known station," and "They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them," apply universally to all angels without exception.

From the perspective of internal textual consistency, the Qur'an presents no contradiction concerning the ranks of the angels. Despite their varying degrees and the diverse functions they perform within the order of creation, each angel faithfully carries out the duty assigned to it exactly as ordained. The privileged status of certain angels as those brought near to God likewise derives from their divinely assigned and predetermined stations.

From the standpoint of consistency with the doctrine of monotheism, restricting the functions of the angels exclusively to God's command negates any notion of their independent agency, thereby fully harmonizing with the doctrine of monotheism in Action. Likewise, from the perspective of rational coherence, the Qur'anic concept of fixed and well-defined angelic ranks presents a coherent and defensible framework free from ambiguity. In contrast, the biblical tradition is characterized by ambiguity and conflicting reports concerning the hierarchy of angels.

The following section compares the concept of the angels nearest to God in the Islamic and biblical traditions.

3.3.1. The Established Rank of the Angels Nearest to God

In the Islamic tradition, four archangels are regarded as the foremost among God's angels. Among them, Gabriel occupies the highest and most honored rank and presides over the other angels. The Qur'an describes him as: "Possessing great power, established in rank before the Lord of the Throne, obeyed there, and trustworthy." (al-Takwīr: 20-21)

In several Qur'anic verses, Gabriel is mentioned separately from the other angels (al-Baqarah: 97-98; al-Taḥrīm: 4), underscoring his unique status.

The Jewish tradition, however, presents a different picture. The Book of Daniel identifies Michael as the chief of the angels (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1), and the Epistle of Jude likewise refers to him as the archangel (Jude 9). According to Jewish belief, every nation has its guardian angel, and Michael serves as the guardian of Israel. Michael and Gabriel are regarded as the two greatest angels and are frequently mentioned together, cooperating in the fulfillment of divine missions (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 119).

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In some passages, Gabriel is portrayed as assisting Michael; however, in the Apocryphal writings, Raphael replaces Gabriel in this role, with Michael serving as Raphael's helper (cf. Daniel 10:9ff.; Deuterocanonical Books, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 688). Gabriel's role is then limited primarily to interpreting prophetic visions (Daniel 8:15ff.; Deuterocanonical Books, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 687).

In the New Testament, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians speaks of "The voice of the archangel" accompanying God's descent on the Day of Resurrection:

"The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God." (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

Likewise, the Book of Revelation depicts Michael as commander of the heavenly hosts. In the heavenly battle, Michael and the angels under his command fight against the dragon and his evil angels, who are ultimately defeated and cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-8).

According to the Talmud, Michael ranks above Gabriel. Nevertheless, Gabriel alone is said to understand Hebrew, whereas the other angels, because of their jealousy, are deprived of understanding the Hebrew language. Consequently, Jews are instructed to pray only in Hebrew so as not to arouse the envy of the angels (Zarqā', 1199: 89). This belief may, however, have functioned primarily to preserve the Hebrew language during a period when Aramaic had largely replaced it, and Hebrew risked falling into disuse.

The Talmud also maintains that angels are assigned specific responsibilities and occupy different hierarchical levels. At their head stand four chief angels, corresponding to the four divisions of the Israelite camp described in Numbers 2 (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 118).

The Apocryphal books, however, speak instead of seven archangels, each entrusted with distinct responsibilities (Tobit 12:15; cf. al-Khabbāz: 101-102). These "Holy Angels" are identified as Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel (Darwish, 2008: 108-109). Within these writings, Gabriel is described as being responsible for Paradise, the other angels, and even the demons (The Torah: Intertestamental Writings, vol. 2, p. 38). The same writings also report that the Prophet Enoch witnessed in a vision four great angels exercising supreme authority over the remaining angels (ibid: 2, 48). Thus, within Christian tradition, the number of principal angels varies between four and seven, each having distinct functions.

3.3.2. The Superiority of the Angels

In Islamic teachings, angels occupy an exalted and honored position. The Qur'an consistently praises them, reflecting their distinguished status within the created order. At the same time, several Qur'anic verses imply the superiority of perfected humanity over the angels, most notably in God's command that the angels prostrate before Adam (al-Baqarah: 34).

Furthermore, the opening verses of Surah *al-Najm*, together with the traditions explaining them, indicate that the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) possesses a rank even higher than that of the nearest angels. During the *Mi'rāj* (Ascension), when Gabriel ceased accompanying the Prophet, he explained: "If I were to advance even the distance of a fingertip, I would be consumed." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 13, 8)

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Although the Bible generally portrays angels as beings more perfect than humans, worthy of standing in the immediate presence of God's glorious throne (Cohen, 1971 AD/1350 SH: 89), it also attributes sins to the angels identified as the "Sons of God" (Genesis 6:1-6).

An Israelite tradition preserved in an Apocryphal work further depicts angels as mediating the ascension of Enoch (cf. Maryam: 56-57) into heaven (Darwish, 2008: 138-140; The Torah: Intertestamental Writings, 1998: 2, 35). The New Testament likewise contains passages that appear inconsistent regarding the relative superiority of angels and human beings (Halley, n.d.: 700). For example, the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, on the one hand, Christ's superiority over the angels (Hebrews 1:4-14), while elsewhere it states that Christ was made "For a little while lower than the angels." (Hebrews 2:1-8; cf. 2 Peter 2:11)

Although these passages may initially seem contradictory, many Christian scholars and commentators reconcile them through contextual and theological interpretation, arguing that the comparison ultimately emphasizes the exalted dignity of redeemed humanity, which has benefited from God's saving grace (Halley, n.d.: 700-701).

Another Islamic narration reports that when Gabriel led the Prophet Muḥammad in prayer, he declared: "We do not go before the descendants of Adam ever since we were commanded to prostrate before Adam." (Ḥuwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 58)

The plural pronoun "We" together with the present-tense verb in this narration conveys both universality and continuity, indicating that none of the angels

precedes any human being whom God has elevated above them (Javadi Amoli, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 3, 46).

Conclusion

A comparative examination of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible concerning angels reveals both significant similarities and substantial differences. Among their common features is the belief that angels constitute one of the most fundamental elements of the created order, possessing distinct ranks, degrees, and clearly defined responsibilities. Their foremost mission is the communication of divine revelation and the execution of God's commands. In both the Islamic tradition and the Jewish and Christian traditions, angels continuously glorify God, and this glorification itself reflects their role in administering the universe by God's permission. Likewise, their appearance to human beings in human form and their assistance to humanity are shared elements across the three Abrahamic religions. These commonalities ultimately stem from their shared religious origin, since Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all trace their roots to the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition.

In Islam, however, the distinction between angels and Satan is absolute and unequivocal. All angels are inherently free from sin, each faithfully fulfills the duty assigned to it, and all are completely obedient to the divine command. Islamic traditions likewise describe the status, functions, activities, and scope of angelic responsibilities with remarkable clarity and precision. Some narrations portraying angels in ways that contradict the explicit teachings of the Qur'an bear unmistakable marks of Israelite traditions, as their contents correspond closely to narratives preserved in Jewish sources.

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Beyond these observations, the superiority of the Qur'anic perspective may be evaluated according to the three criteria adopted in this study, internal coherence, consistency with divine unity and the attributes of God, and rational coherence.

From the perspective of internal coherence, the Qur'anic portrayal of all three fundamental characteristics of angels, glorification, impeccability, and their fixed rank, is entirely free from contradiction. By contrast, the Bible presents inconsistent and conflicting accounts regarding angelic impeccability, depicting both "Obedient Angels" (e.g., in the Psalms) and "Fallen Angels" (e.g., in Genesis). Consequently, inconsistencies concerning the nature of angels are far more widespread in the Bible, the Apocrypha, and the Talmud than is commonly assumed. However, certain passages within these sources do correspond with the Qur'anic account.

According to the criterion of consistency with monotheism, the Qur'anic doctrine of the absolute impeccability of angels accords fully with God's perfect knowledge, wisdom, and omnipotence. In contrast, attributing fallibility to angels in the biblical tradition implies that God entrusts His revelation and commands to intermediaries who are capable of error, a notion that is difficult to reconcile with divine wisdom.

Finally, the Qur'anic concept of a determined rank provides a rational and coherent framework for understanding the hierarchical order and assigned functions of angels. It offers a systematic and philosophically defensible account of the angelic realm. By comparison, the ambiguities and inconsistent classifications found in the Apocryphal literature, such as varying accounts

identifying four to seven archangels, lack the same degree of logical coherence and systematic consistency.

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