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From Glory to Theophany: A Comparative Study of Moses' Request to See God in the Quran and the Old Testament

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Abstract

The narrative of the Prophet Moses' request to behold God appears in both the Holy Quran and the Old Testament. In the Quran, this episode is found in (Quran 7:143), while the Old Testament presents it most extensively in Exodus 33. The Quran introduces the concept of divine manifestation alongside Moses' request, whereas the Old Testament frames the encounter primarily through the notion of God's glory. Among Muslim exegetes, significant disagreement persists regarding both the nature of the vision of God and the interpretation of manifestation, resulting in a broad spectrum of theological and exegetical perspectives. Employing a comparative methodology, this study addresses three central questions: 'Does a

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comparative analysis of the Quranic and Old Testament accounts yield a more precise understanding of this episode?' 'What are the main similarities and differences between the two scriptural traditions?' 'Beyond apparent agreements and divergences, can deeper semantic and theological correspondences be discerned?' This research utilizes a library-based approach, examining primary texts (Quranic verses and relevant Biblical passages), analyzing Islamic exegetical traditions, and conducting comparative textual analysis. The findings indicate that both scriptures deny the possibility of a direct vision of the Divine Essence, while emphasizing the inherent limitations of human perception. Additionally, the Old Testament's focus on the glory of God offers significant comparative support for Islamic interpretations that view Moses' request not as a vision of the Divine Essence, but as the manifestation of God's signs and attributes.

Keywords: Vision of God, Divine Manifestation, Glory of God, Moses, Comparative Exegesis.

Introduction

Moses' request to behold God represents a profound theological, philosophical, epistemological, and mystical issue within the Abrahamic religious traditions. This episode challenges the boundaries of human sensory and intellectual perception and raises fundamental questions regarding the possibility or impossibility of directly perceiving the Divine Essence, the relationship between humanity's desire for ultimate knowledge and its existential limitations, the balance between divine transcendence and self-disclosure, and the significance of exceptional prophetic experiences in shaping religious knowledge.

As Kalim Allah (the one who spoke directly with God) and a preeminent prophet in the Abrahamic tradition, Moses exemplifies the highest degree of nearness to God. Nevertheless, this unparalleled proximity demonstrates that even God's closest servants are subject to the existential and epistemological

limitations inherent in human nature when confronted with the majesty of the Divine Essence.

This event is narrated most explicitly in Quran 7:143 and described in detail in Exodus 33, with additional references elsewhere in the Old Testament. The Quran introduces manifestation (divine manifestation) alongside Moses' request, whereas the Old Testament frames the encounter primarily through the concept of the glory of God.

Muslim exegetes have long debated both the precise meaning of Moses' request to see God and the interpretation of divine manifestation. Explanations of manifestation range from its basic lexical meaning to complex philosophical, mystical, and theological interpretations. Because the Old Testament also addresses this event, especially in Exodus, through the concept of the glory of God, this study employs a comparative approach to clarify the central questions:

- Does a comparative analysis of the Quranic and Old Testament narratives lead to a more accurate understanding of this event?
- What are the principal similarities and differences between the two accounts?
- Beyond their apparent convergences and divergences, can deeper theological and semantic correspondences be identified?

To address these questions, this study examines the relevant Quranic verses and Biblical passages, reviews the historical development of Islamic exegetical interpretations and their main points of disagreement, and uses comparative linguistics and inter-textual analysis to evaluate the relationship between the two scriptural traditions. Previous scholarship has generally focused on the concepts of vision and divine manifestation, with few

systematic comparisons to the Old Testament narrative. Recent comparative studies include "The Language of the Quran and the Two Testaments in the Question of the Vision of God" by Sayyid Hadi Taghavi and Mohammad Hadi Amin Naji (Journal of Quran and the Two Testaments, 2024), which primarily adopts a philosophical-linguistic approach and gives limited attention to Moses' request or the concept of manifestation. Another relevant work is Ismail Dudman's master's thesis, "The Image of God in the Torah and the Quran" (University of Isfahan, 2011), which explores different models of the concept of God in both scriptures. However, both studies differ fundamentally from the present research, which integrates comparative textual analysis with linguistic evidence from both the Quran and the Old Testament and focuses on whether the two accounts converge in denying direct vision of the Divine Essence.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Biblical citations in this article are taken from the Persian translations available in the Mojdeh Software database.

1. Moses' Request to See God in the Quran

The Quran attributes the request to see God to both the Prophet Moses and, collectively, the Children of Israel. The most comprehensive account appears in Quran 7:143, where God states:

"And when Moses came at Our appointed time, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, "My Lord, show Yourself to me that I may look upon You." He said, "You shall never see Me. But look at the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then you will see Me." When his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He reduced it to dust, and Moses fell unconscious. When he recovered, he said, "Glory be to You! I repent to You, and I am the first of the believers." (Quran 7:143)

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This verse presents, in a remarkably concise yet comprehensive manner, Moses' request, the divine response emphasizing the impossibility of direct vision (You shall never see Me), the mountain as the criterion for enduring the divine manifestation, the manifestation itself, its devastating effect on the mountain, Moses' loss of consciousness, and finally his repentance and renewed submission before God.

The collective request of the Children of Israel is likewise mentioned elsewhere in the Quran, particularly in Quran 2:55 and 4:153. According to these verses, the Israelites conditioned their belief in Moses and his Lord upon seeing God openly. The divine response to this demand was the thunderbolt that overtook them. Furthermore, Quran 7:155 refers to Moses' selection of seventy men from among his people to accompany him to the appointed meeting with God.

2. Moses' Request to See God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament records Moses' request to behold God most extensively in Exodus 33:12-23. Within this passage, Moses asks God to reveal His glory to him. In response, God declares that He will cause all His goodness to pass before Moses and proclaim the divine name, YHWH, before him. God further affirms that He grants grace and mercy according to His sovereign will.

God then tells Moses:

"You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

God nevertheless provides Moses with a place beside Him on a rock. As His glory passes by, He places Moses in a cleft of the rock and covers him with His hand until He has passed. Afterwards, He removes His hand so that Moses may see His "Back," while His face remains unseen (Exodus 33:18-23).

This narrative constitutes one of the Old Testament's most significant accounts of the encounter between humanity and God. Moses' request to behold the divine glory closely parallels the Quranic account in 7:143, with one notable distinction: whereas the Quran speaks simply of Moses' request to "See" God, the Old Testament explicitly identifies the object of the request as God's glory.

3. The Requesters of the Vision

The Quran refers to the request to see God in four verses. Three explicitly concern the request itself, while one refers to Moses' appointment at the divine meeting. Among these, Quran 7:143 clearly presents the request as originating from Moses himself, whereas Quran 2:55 and 4:153 attribute the demand to the Children of Israel, who made their belief contingent upon seeing God openly.

Quran 7:143 explicitly states that God spoke directly to Moses before Moses made his request. By contrast, the other verses describe the collective demand of the Israelites:

"...They demanded of Moses something even greater than that, saying: "Show us, God, openly." (Quran 4:153)

Likewise:

"...You said: "O Moses, we will never believe you until we see God openly," whereupon the thunderbolt seized you while you were looking on." (Quran 2:55)

The Old Testament similarly preserves two related traditions. Some passages portray the request as originating from the people, whereas others attribute it directly to Moses. In Exodus 19:21, God commands Moses to warn the people not to cross the prescribed boundary to look upon Him, lest many of them

perish. Likewise, Quran 7:155 mentions the selection of seventy men, a detail paralleled in Exodus 24:9, where Moses ascends the mountain with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel.

The Quran explicitly states that God spoke directly to Moses. At the same time, the Old Testament likewise records that Moses ascended Mount Sinai to meet God and that God spoke with him from the mountain (Exodus 19:3). Elsewhere, however, the Israelites themselves are portrayed as participating, albeit indirectly, in the divine encounter:

"You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice." (Deuteronomy 4:12)

The Old Testament further suggests that although the Israelites desired an encounter with God, they simultaneously feared it. Their fear appears to stem from God's warning, Moses' admonitions, or their experience of witnessing God's overwhelming power during the Exodus. Consequently, they pleaded with Moses:

"You speak to us, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:19)

This statement closely corresponds to the Quranic account in which the Israelites are struck by the thunderbolt following their demand to see God.

4. The Vision of God in the Views of Muslim Exegetes

Muslim exegetes have long held divergent views regarding the meaning and nature of Moses' request to see God. These disagreements gradually developed into one of the most significant theological debates in Islamic intellectual history.

Many exegetes of the second and third Islamic centuries refrained from offering a detailed explanation of the concept of vision, leaving the verse

without extensive theological interpretation (cf. *Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, Qummī, Farrāʾ, Abū ʿUbaydah*, ad Quran 7:143). Among the early commentators, *Ṭabarī* cites several transmitted reports concerning the verse, all of which acknowledge only that Moses made a request, without discussing its precise nature or modality (Ṭabarī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 9, 35). These reports, however, have two major weaknesses: "They are either *Mawqūf* or *Maqṭūʿ* traditions, and none can be traced to an infallible authority."

Ṭūsī observes that Muslim scholars differed considerably concerning the meaning of vision. He records three principal interpretations. First, Moses requested on behalf of the Children of Israel rather than himself. Second, the intended meaning of "Vision" was necessary knowledge, a form of immediate certainty that will ultimately be realized in the Hereafter. Third, Moses sought to witness one of the divine signs associated with the Resurrection to attain an unshakable certainty comparable to that possessed by the inhabitants of the Hereafter (Ṭūsī, n.d.: 4, 535). Significantly, *Ṭūsī* merely reports these views without expressing a preference for any of them.

The interpretation of vision as necessary knowledge appears to have been articulated systematically for the first time by *Jaṣṣāṣ* in the fourth Islamic century (Jaṣṣāṣ, 1984 AD/1405 AH: 4, 209). Earlier exegetical traditions contain no explicit reference to this interpretation, and even *Jaṣṣāṣ* introduces it with the expression "*Qīla*" (it has been said), indicating its tentative status. Although this view received little attention in the medieval period, Allamah *Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī* revived and elaborated it extensively in the modern era.

Among medieval exegetes, *Qurṭubī* argues that Moses' request reflected an intense longing to behold God. He rejects the suggestion that Moses merely

wished to witness one of God's great signs, pointing out that Moses explicitly said, "Show Yourself to me so that I may look upon You," whereas God's reply was, "You shall never see Me." (Qurṭubī, n.d.: 7, 278) Over time, this exegetical disagreement evolved into a major theological controversy. *Fakhr Rāzī* devotes an extensive discussion to the dispute between the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites, ultimately siding with the latter in affirming the possibility of seeing God, while refraining from explaining how such vision would occur (Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 14, 353-359).

In contrast to the Muʿtazilites, who interpreted the divine statement "You shall never see Me" as excluding any possibility of seeing God in either this world or the Hereafter, many Sunni exegetes regarded this interpretation as the weakest position. Relying on numerous prophetic traditions, they maintained that the believers will indeed behold God in the Hereafter (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 3, 421).

Other interpreters questioned whether Moses' request should be understood literally. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabāʾī*, for example, argues that the request cannot be interpreted as an ordinary sensory demand, since such a request would be incompatible with Moses' prophetic knowledge (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 8, 305).

Some later commentators interpreted the expression "Show Yourself to me" as a request for the capacity or power to behold God, rather than for the vision itself. Under this interpretation, Moses asked God to grant him the ability through which such a vision might become possible (Zuḥaylī, n.d.: 9, 84; Marāghī, n.d.: 9, 57). Interestingly, *Zamakhsharī* had already advanced a similar interpretation in the sixth Islamic century (Zamakhsharī, ibid: 3, 153). Nevertheless, neither the wording of the verse nor its immediate context lends

strong support to this reading, since the request is expressed in absolute terms without any indication that the requested object is merely the capacity for vision.

Mystical and spiritual interpretations also emerged over time. Sayyid *Quṭb* suggests that Moses' overwhelming yearning for God momentarily caused him to forget the limitations of human nature, leading him to ask for something that lies beyond human capacity in earthly existence (Quṭb, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 3, 1369). This interpretation, however, rests primarily upon spiritual reflection rather than explicit textual evidence.

Ibn ʿĀshūr attempts to reconcile the possibility of the beatific vision in the Hereafter with its impossibility in this world. He argues that Moses undoubtedly sought a vision appropriate to the Divine Majesty, the very vision promised to believers in the Hereafter. Moses assumed that such a vision might also be attainable during earthly life, but God informed him otherwise. According to *Ibn ʿĀshūr*, ignorance of certain aspects of the Divine Reality does not diminish prophetic status until God Himself discloses those realities. Consequently, the Ashʿarite position that appeals to Moses' request as evidence for the possibility of the beatific vision remains defensible, provided that such a vision is understood in a manner befitting God's transcendence and without attempting to describe its modality (Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 8, 275).

Among contemporary Shiʿi exegetes, Allamah *Ṭabāṭabāʾī* offers perhaps the most systematic explanation. He argues that Moses' request concerns necessary and immediate knowledge, rather than visual perception in its ordinary sensory sense. Such knowledge represents the highest and most certain form of cognition, and the Quran metaphorically expresses this

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certainty through the language of "Vision." Drawing upon the concept of immediate knowledge, *Ṭabāṭabāʾī* contends that "Seeing God" signifies direct existential awareness rather than sensory observation. Human beings cannot attain this degree of awareness during earthly life because their existence remains bound to bodily limitations. Accordingly, the divine declaration "You shall never see Me" should be understood as referring specifically to worldly existence and to humanity's incapacity, not to the absolute impossibility of such knowledge (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 8, 306-311).

This interpretation becomes persuasive only if Moses himself was the sole requester. However, if the request originated from the Children of Israel, as suggested by other Quranic passages, supported by several Muslim exegetes, and reflected in the Old Testament narrative, the interpretation of vision as immediate spiritual knowledge becomes much harder to sustain. In that case, the request appears to concern either literal visual perception or some form of publicly observable divine manifestation, since extending the notion of presential knowledge simultaneously to seventy individuals is theoretically possible but historically improbable.

The foregoing survey demonstrates that the central point of disagreement among Muslim exegetes concerns the object and nature of the requested vision. These competing interpretations eventually gave rise to diverse theological schools, while the transmitted traditions themselves provide no definitive resolution. Because the same episode also appears in the Old Testament, a closer examination of the Biblical narrative is essential for evaluating these competing interpretations.

5. Moses' Vision of God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament presents Moses' request to see God most explicitly in Exodus 33. In verse 18, Moses says to God: "Please show me Your glory." (Exodus 33:18)

This statement corresponds closely to Moses' request in the Quran: "My Lord, show Yourself to me that I may look upon You." (Quran 7:143) The principal distinction is that the Old Testament explicitly identifies the object of Moses' request as the glory of God, whereas the Quranic account leaves the object of vision unqualified. From a linguistic perspective, the correspondence between the two texts is particularly striking. Both employ cognate Semitic verbal roots to express the concept of "Seeing." The Quran uses the Arabic root (*r-ʾ-y*), while the Old Testament employs the Hebrew root ראה (*rāʾāh*), the direct Hebrew cognate of the Arabic form. The consonantal structure of the Hebrew verb, resh (ר), aleph (א), and he (ה), corresponds closely to the Arabic (*rāʾ*), *hamzah* (ʾ), and (*hāʾ*). Their pronunciation and primary semantic value are likewise almost identical, both fundamentally denoting "To see." The final Hebrew letter he (ה) commonly functions as a vowel marker in word-final position, producing a long *ā* sound.

The Hebrew verb ראה (*rāʾāh*) and its derivatives occur more than 1,300 times throughout the Old Testament. Their semantic range includes seeing, looking, appearing, observing, perceiving, and related meanings, although nearly 900 occurrences denote ordinary visual perception. For example, after the crossing of the Red Sea: "Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore." (Exodus 14:30)

Conversely, the Old Testament also attributes "Seeing" to God. Throughout the creation narrative, following the creation of various elements of the universe, Scripture repeatedly states: "God saw that it was good." (Genesis 1)

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Similarly, the Quran attributes "Seeing" to God in numerous verses, such as: "Does he not know that Allah sees?" (Quran 96:14). In both scriptures, however, divine "Seeing" is clearly metaphorical, referring not to physical sight but to God's perfect knowledge, complete awareness, and comprehensive sovereignty over creation.

The second half of Moses' request likewise reveals remarkable convergence between the two traditions. The Quran records God's immediate response: "You shall never see Me." (Quran 7:143) Likewise, the Old Testament states: "You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20) Again, both texts use the same Semitic verbal root for "seeing." More importantly, both affirm the impossibility of directly beholding the Divine Essence.

The Old Testament universalizes this impossibility by declaring that no human being can see God and remain alive. Likewise, the Quran portrays the demand to see God as exceeding human capacity. When the Children of Israel insisted upon seeing God openly, they were struck by a thunderbolt, died, and were subsequently restored to life (Quran 2:55-56; 7:155). Although the Old Testament does not narrate the death and revival of the seventy elders, it repeatedly emphasizes their profound fear of approaching God, lest they perish (Exodus 20:19).

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate a remarkably high degree of theological convergence. Both scriptures reject the possibility of direct vision of God's Essence while simultaneously portraying humanity's encounter with overwhelming manifestations of the Divine Presence.

The principal question that nevertheless remains unresolved concerns the relationship between vision, divine manifestation in the Quran, and the glory of God in the Old Testament.

Whereas the Old Testament explicitly identifies the object of Moses' request as the glory of God, the Quran records Moses' request to "See" God. This absence of explicit qualification has generated a wide range of interpretations among Muslim exegetes about the true object of Moses' request.

Accordingly, properly evaluating the competing Islamic interpretations requires a careful semantic analysis of the Biblical concept of the Glory of God (*kābôd YHWH*), to which we now turn.

6. The Glory of God in the Old Testament

Within the Old Testament, the concept of the Glory of God is expressed primarily through words derived from the Hebrew root כבד (*k-b-d*, *kābad*). The fundamental semantic notion conveyed by this root is weight or heaviness, from which a wide range of related meanings developed, including honor, dignity, majesty, splendor, glory, magnificence, and importance. One of its most common nominal derivatives is כָּבוֹד (*kābôd*), a term that occurs about two hundred times in the Old Testament and serves as the principal expression of divine glory.

Although this root's semantic field is broad, its core concept remains weightiness or substantiality. Whether employed literally or metaphorically, the various meanings associated with *kābad* ultimately derive from this central idea.

For example, suffering is described as being "Heavier than the sand of the sea." (Job 6:3) God's hand is said to be heavy upon the Philistines in judgment (1 Samuel 5:11). Labor imposed upon the Israelites is characterized as heavy

(Exodus 5:9). In contrast, eyes (Genesis 48:10), ears (Isaiah 59:1), and even the human heart are described as becoming heavy or hardened, particularly in contexts of rebellion against God (Exodus 7:14). Despite their different applications, these expressions all preserve the fundamental notion of weight or gravity.

The same root also denotes honor, respect, and esteem. Thus, Scripture commands: "Honor your father and your mother." (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) Likewise, Jerusalem (Lamentations 1:8) and the Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13) are associated with honor and glory. Above all, however, honor and glory belong preeminently to God, as the biblical text repeatedly emphasizes.

Among all uses of kābôd, its application to God is by far the most significant. During Israel's complaint for food in the wilderness, an event culminating in the provision of manna and quail, Moses announces: "Tomorrow you shall see the glory of the LORD." (Exodus 16:7) The following day, the narrative explains that the glory of the LORD appeared to the people within the cloud (Exodus 16:10).

Elsewhere, the divine glory is explicitly compared to consuming fire: "The appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire." (Exodus 24:17) During Israel's wilderness journey, the cloud that accompanied the people functioned not merely as shelter but also as divine guidance. God's glory repeatedly manifests in this cloud (Exodus 40:34-38). The Quran similarly refers to God's shading the Israelites with clouds (Quran 2:57; 7:160), although it does not explicitly identify the cloud with the divine glory. Following Israel's refusal to enter the Promised Land because of fear of its inhabitants, the people rebelled against Moses and contemplated returning to

Egypt. Although God initially resolved to punish them, Moses interceded on their behalf. Thereafter God declared: "As surely as I live... the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD." (Numbers 14:21) Immediately afterwards, God explains this declaration by referring to those who had witnessed His glory together with His signs performed in Egypt and in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22).

This association is particularly significant. Here, God's glory appears alongside the miraculous signs of the Exodus, such as the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses' staff, and the shining hand, all of which are narrated in both the Quran and the Old Testament. Consequently, in this context, divine glory is closely connected with God's miraculous acts in history rather than with direct perception of the Divine Essence.

In other passages, God's glory denotes His power, majesty, and sovereignty. For example: "Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength." (1 Chronicles 16:28) Similarly, "The heavens declare the glory of God." (Psalm 19:1) Another Psalm asks: "Who is this King of Glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle." (Psalm 24:8)

The Hebrew expressions translated "Strong" and "Mighty" derive from roots cognate with the Arabic roots (*ʿ-z-z*) and (*j-b-r*), respectively. Interestingly, these same attributes appear together in the Quran among the Divine Names:"...the Almighty (*al-ʿAzīz*), the Compeller (*al-Jabbār*)." (Quran 59:23) This lexical correspondence illustrates another point of convergence between the Quranic and Biblical portrayals of the Divine.

The foregoing evidence demonstrates that the expression "The Glory of God" encompasses a remarkably broad semantic field within the Old Testament. Depending upon the context, it may refer to radiant light, cloud, fire, divine

power, majesty, sovereignty, miraculous signs, or the visible manifestation of God's presence among His people.

From this perspective, the Old Testament does not identify God's glory with His Essence. Rather, glory functions as the mode through which the otherwise transcendent God becomes manifest within creation while remaining essentially beyond direct human vision.

This observation matters for interpreting the Quranic concept of manifestation. If the Old Testament explicitly understands the object of Moses' request to be God's glory rather than God's Essence, then its testimony lends comparative support to those Islamic interpretations that understand manifestation as the manifestation of divine attributes, signs, or acts, rather than as a direct disclosure of the Divine Essence itself.

7. The Meaning of Divine Manifestation (*Manifestation*) in the Quran

After declaring the impossibility of directly seeing Him, the Quran states that God manifested Himself to the mountain, whereupon the mountain crumbled, and Moses fell unconscious. The verse reads: "...Then, when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He reduced it to dust, and Moses fell unconscious." (Quran 7:143) This statement raises a fundamental theological question. If direct vision of God is impossible, what precisely does manifestation (divine manifestation) signify? Furthermore, how can divine manifestation be reconciled with the categorical denial of direct vision?

Early Muslim exegetes offered remarkably little explanation of the term. Several second- and third-century commentators, including *Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, *Farrāʾ*, *Abū ʿUbaydah*, and *Tustarī*, either passed over the expression without comment or merely repeated the Quranic wording without

attempting to define its nature. Their silence raises two possibilities: "Either the early Muslim community regarded the meaning of manifestation as self-evident, or its precise theological implications had not yet become the subject of systematic reflection."

Among the earliest commentators, *Ibn Qutaybah* interpreted manifestation according to its lexical meaning: "To become manifest," or "That which God willed from His command became manifest." Likewise, the early Shiʿi exegete *Qummī* understood the verse as referring to the removal of a veil, although he did not explain the nature of that veil or the manner in which it was lifted. Consequently, the earliest exegetical tradition generally refrained from discussing the modality of the divine manifestation.

Beginning in the fourth Islamic century, exegetical discussions became more detailed. *Ibn Abī Ḥātim* records three reports concerning the extent of the manifestation. Two traditions state that it amounted only to the measure of the little finger, while another explains *manifestation* as the partial removal of the divine veil. Similarly, *Samarqandī*, citing *Ḍaḥḥāk*, reports that God cast His light upon the mountain, interpreting manifestation as the appearance of divine light. The transmission, however, is disconnected and therefore cannot conclusively establish the interpretation.

Jaṣṣāṣ presents two possible explanations. First, manifestation could denote direct vision, although he rejects this meaning as impossible with respect to God. Second, it may refer to the manifestation of God's signs, which became evident to those present at the mountain. This latter interpretation shifts the emphasis away from God's Essence toward the disclosure of divine acts.

A tradition preserved by *ʿAyyāshī* narrates that when the manifestation occurred, a gate of heaven was opened and angels descended carrying pillars

filled with light. They addressed Moses, saying: "You have asked an immense question."

Thereafter, the narration states that God manifested Himself. Although rich in imagery, the report provides no precise explanation of the nature of the manifestation and is transmitted without a complete chain of authority.

Among the classical commentators, *Ṭabarī* gives particular attention to this question. He himself interprets manifestation as the appearance of divine light. Most of the reports he transmits concern the magnitude of the manifestation, again describing it as no greater than the little finger, while another attributes the destruction of the mountain to the appearance of that light. One narration from *Rabīʿ* explains that when the veil was lifted and the light appeared, the mountain crumbled. Yet this report remains isolated and does not reach the Prophet or an infallible authority, thereby limiting its evidential value.

These early interpretations suggest that many exegetes either regarded the concept of manifestation as sufficiently obvious to require no elaboration or lacked a precise theological explanation. Nevertheless, several traditions consistently associate the manifestation with light, although the textual foundations for this interpretation remain relatively weak.

During the fifth Islamic century, *Ṭūsī* interpreted manifestation as the manifestation of God's signs, which became visible upon the mountain and were witnessed by those present. By contrast, *Sourabadi* offered virtually no explanation of the expression.

The sixth century witnessed a substantial expansion of interpretive diversity. *Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī* became one of the first commentators to survey the various opinions systematically. He mentions interpretations identifying

manifestation with the appearance of divine light, the lifting of the veil, and divine revelation to the mountain, before suggesting that in each case an implicit expression such as "The manifestation of the light of His Lord" should be understood.

Zamakhsharī, however, adopts a markedly different approach. Rather than interpreting manifestation as the appearance of light, he understands it as the manifestation of God's power and the execution of His divine will. *Ṭabarsī* similarly argues that what became manifest was God's command, through which those present recognized that direct vision of the Divine Essence was impossible.

Interestingly, despite his extensive discussion of the theological controversy surrounding the vision of God, *Fakhr Rāzī* provides only a brief explanation of manifestation, essentially repeating *Zajjāj*'s interpretation that it simply means "To become manifest." This brevity suggests that, although he defended the possibility of the beatific vision in principle, he did not claim to understand precisely how the divine manifestation occurred.

From the sixth century onward, these interpretations spread widely throughout the exegetical tradition. Individual commentators generally adopted one or more of the existing explanations without introducing substantially new approaches.

A notable exception appears in Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*'s *al-Mīzān*. Unlike earlier exegetes, he does not attempt to define the nature of manifestation itself. Instead, he explains why Moses lost consciousness. According to *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, Moses did not faint because the mountain collapsed. Rather, at that moment the overwhelming reality of God's majesty and judgment became existentially present to him, depriving him of the capacity to remain standing. This

interpretation appears to be unique within the exegetical tradition. Significantly, however, *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* offers neither Quranic evidence nor prophetic traditions in support of this explanation, leaving the proposal largely speculative.

The foregoing survey demonstrates that Muslim exegetes have interpreted manifestation in three principal ways:

1. The manifestation of divine light;
2. The manifestation of God's signs or miraculous acts;
3. The manifestation of God's command, power, or sovereign will.

Despite their differences, all three interpretations share one fundamental feature: none identifies the manifestation with a direct disclosure of the Divine Essence itself.

Indeed, when considered alongside the Old Testament concept of the Glory of God, the second and third interpretations acquire additional comparative support. In both scriptural traditions, the divine manifestation is consistently mediated through God's actions, power, majesty, or signs rather than through an immediate vision of God's Essence. This convergence provides an important comparative framework for understanding manifestation not as direct vision but as the historical and perceptible disclosure of God's presence through created realities.

Conclusion

A comparative examination of Moses' request to see God in the Quran and the Old Testament reveals substantial convergence between the two scriptural traditions. Both texts affirm the same fundamental theological principle: "The direct vision of the Divine Essence is impossible, whereas a mediated

experience of God's presence or activity remains possible through divine manifestation."

Both the Quran and the Old Testament present the request for the vision of God at two interconnected levels: "As an individual request associated with Moses and as a collective request connected with the Children of Israel. In both traditions, the divine response explicitly denies the possibility of beholding God directly. This correspondence extends beyond theology to the linguistic level, since both scriptures employ cognate Semitic verbal roots to express the concept of "Seeing."

The Quran further distinguishes between the impossibility of direct vision and divine manifestation. God's manifestation to the mountain results in its destruction and causes Moses to lose consciousness, yet the Quran deliberately refrains from describing the precise nature of this manifestation in sensory or material terms. Similarly, the Old Testament associates Moses' request not with God's Essence but with the Glory of God, a concept that encompasses a broad semantic range including light, cloud, fire, divine power, majesty, glory, and the visible manifestations of God's activity.

The survey of Islamic exegetical literature demonstrates that manifestation has been interpreted in various ways, including the manifestation of divine light, the manifestation of God's signs, and the manifestation of God's command or power. Although these interpretations differ significantly, they converge in rejecting the identification of manifestation with the direct vision of the Divine Essence.

The comparative analysis undertaken in this study indicates that the Quranic concept of manifestation and the Old Testament concept of the Glory of God perform closely related theological functions. Both describe a form of divine

self-disclosure that enables human beings to experience God's presence without compromising His absolute transcendence. In each tradition, God's transcendence is preserved while mediated manifestations affirm the possibility of genuine encounter with the Divine rather than immediate perception of God's Essence.

From this perspective, the Old Testament provides valuable comparative evidence for evaluating competing Islamic interpretations of Quran 7:143. In particular, its explicit identification of the object of Moses' request as the Glory of God lends stronger support to those Islamic exegetical approaches that interpret manifestation as the manifestation of God's attributes, signs, power, or acts, rather than as a direct disclosure of the Divine Essence itself.

Accordingly, the present study argues that the principal point of convergence between the Quran and the Old Testament lies not merely in their shared denial of direct vision but in their common theological framework. Both traditions distinguish carefully between God's unknowable Essence and His manifest presence within creation, thereby maintaining a balance between divine transcendence and divine self-disclosure. This shared theological structure constitutes the deepest point of correspondence between the two scriptural accounts and offers a more coherent framework for interpreting Moses' request to see God.

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