

The Descent of Adam in the Torah and the Qur'an



Batul Sadat Amini

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Abstract

The personality of Adam as the first prophet – or even the first human created – as well as the error made by him in heaven is an ongoing topic of discussion amongst followers of the Abrahamic faiths. This article is the comparison between Jewish and Islamic perspectives regarding the descent of Adam and Eve. According to this research, both the Quran and Torah include the event of Adam and Eve's descent with apparent differences in the details about the incident.

Introduction

The Abrahamic faiths differ in their viewpoints regarding the creation of man and the events that took place in heaven, and these differences are seen in their views regarding other prophets as well.

Today, the Torah and Bible that was sent to Moses and Jesus from God are not accessible, and to understand the beliefs of Jews and Christians regarding various matters of principles of religion, we refer to the testaments.

The descent of Adam from heaven to earth is among the topics historically discussed by scholars from the Abrahamic faiths. This article is an analysis of the Quran and the Torah regarding the event of descent and the details surrounding it.

Descent from a Lexical Viewpoint

The term “descent” “هبوط” derives from the root word «هبط», meaning ‘to descend.’

Ibn Faris says, “هبوط” indicates descent¹. Ibn Mandhur believes that the word هبوط negates or counters ‘ascent’². Raghīb Esfahani says, “Descent is when something comes down forcibly, like the descent or falling of a stone...” Raghīb adds that since this term is used for a person, the motive here is to belittle rather than referring in the same manner as the descent of honourable things such as Angels and the Holy Quran.³

According to philologists, descent means to come down from a place of high position. However, that standing does not necessarily have to be in a specific location; descent can be from either a high position or a rank.

Thus, the descent of Adam was a type of decline. As to whether this was a descent from a location or rank, is a topic of discussion amongst scholars.

The Descent of Adam and Eve at a Glance

God placed Adam and Eve as the first humans created, in heaven provided them with all kinds of blessings from amongst foods, drinks, etc. He then warned them not to fall into Satan’s trap as Satan was their manifest enemy. However, Adam and Eve fell prey to Satan after living in heaven for some time, and were expelled from heaven and descended to earth.

Scholars discuss various reasons for Adam’s descent which includes the idea that it was related to the covenant God had made with Adam.

Article 1: God’s Covenant with Adam and Eve

The study of God’s covenant with Adam and Eve is one of the important issues about the subject of Adam’s descent.

In the Quran

The Holy Quran speaks of the covenant made between God and Adam:

وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ آدَمَ مِن قَبْلُ فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا

Certainly We had enjoined Adam earlier; but he forgot, and We did not find any resoluteness in him.⁴

As seen in this verse, a covenant existed between God and Adam, which Adam forgot about. Below are some premises for the meaning of covenant:

Adam's covenant was the command to not approach the tree⁵.

وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

But do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers.⁶

Fakhr Razi says, “Undoubtedly the intent of a covenant is to do that which God commands or forbids; hence the command was to not approach the tree.”⁷ The intent of the covenant was to announce Satan's enmity towards Adam and Eve, and to warn them of Satan's victory over them.

وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

We said, ‘O Adam! This is indeed an enemy of you and your mate.⁸

In Tabarsi's exegesis of the verse, “***Certainly We had enjoined Adam earlier...***,” he cites the verse, “***This is indeed an enemy of you and your mates,***” as an indication of his view.⁹

In the Torah

The covenant between God and Adam has been explicitly mentioned in the Torah. However, after looking at some of its passages, we can conclude that the meaning of covenant was to refrain from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

And God commanded Adam and said, ‘You are permitted to eat from all the trees in the garden. However, you are not permitted to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because the day

you eat from it you will die. 10

Article 2: The Deceiver of Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve descended to earth after being deceived. Who deceived them?

In the Quran

The Quran speaks of a tree that Adam and his wife were told to stay away from.

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا
هَذِهِ

الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

We said, ‘O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof freely whatsoever you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers.’¹¹

According to verses from the Quran, Satan deceived Adam and Eve:

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْلَى

Then Satan tempted him. He said, ‘O Adam! Shall I show you the tree of immortality, and an imperishable kingdom?’¹²

In the Torah

The Torah says the following about the forbidden tree:

And, the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food out of the ground; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. 13

Later it says:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it – for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. 14

In regards to Adam and Eve's deceiver, the Torah says:

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had created. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'you must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*¹⁵

Thus, in these texts the deceiver is the 'serpent,' contrary to the Quran where the deceiver is Satan.

Article 3: Signs of Disobedience

Although God, through His mercy had accepted Adam's repentance, the natural impact of eating from the forbidden tree remained even after his repentance. Although repentance is effective before God, the effect of doing a forbidden act persists, which was apparent from the scene when their private parts were revealed; so they had to cover themselves with leaves, and descend to earth afterwards.

Also, according to the Torah, God had warned Adam and Eve that they would die upon eating from the tree. However, we see clearly in the events that took place after eating from the tree, as narrated in the Torah, that this threat was not carried out.

The uncovering of the private parts and the descent in both the Quran and Torah will be analyzed in the following section:

The Exposing of the Private Parts

The exposure of Adam and Eve's private parts was the first effect of their disobedience.

In the Quran

The Quran says:

فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ ۖ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا
مِنْ

وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلَّ لَكُمَا إِنَّ
الشَّيْطَانَ

Thus he brought about their fall by deception. So when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness became exposed to them and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, “Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you, ‘Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?’”¹⁶

According to the above verse, picking up of a single fruit from the forbidden tree led to such a bitter outcome that they became stripped of the heavenly garments – the garments of dignity and respect.

Thus, Adam and Eve were not bare before committing the misdeed; rather, they were clothed. However, the Quran does not say how they were clothed. Nevertheless, that which they were clothed in served as a mark of respect for Adam and Eve’s character, whereas with their disobedience it fell from their bodies.¹⁷¹⁷

In the Torah

In the Torah, this subject is presented as such:

...she took from its fruit and ate; and she also gave to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. ¹⁸

In the aforementioned text, it was made clear that according to the Quran, Adam and Eve were clothed until after committing the misdeed. However, in the Torah the following has been said:

*“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*¹⁹

Thus, we gather that the Torah speaks of Adam and Eve as having been naked even before committing the misdeed, though they did not comprehend its indecency. And when they ate from the forbidden tree of knowledge, their eyes saw through wisdom that they were unclothed, thus realizing their ungainly state.

Therefore, in the Torah, Adam lacked so vastly in knowledge that he was not even able to recognize his own nakedness. However, in the Qur’an, Adam not only knew of his state, but he also knew about the secrets of creation (i.e. knowledge of the names) and was considered a teacher to the angels. Moreover, if Satan was able to influence him, it was not because of his lack of knowledge, but rather because of his purity of heart and innocence.²⁰

Descent

The above-described events led to the descent of Adam and Eve. The following section explains the

descent.

In the Quran

The Quran has mentioned the subject of descent and Adam's exodus from heaven to earth in at least four instances.

Descent in Location or Rank

The Quran says:

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ ۚ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ
عَدُوٌّ

ۚ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

Then Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what they were in; and We said, 'Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time. 21

Among the various notions that exist about the heaven that Adam and Eve resided in, some believe it to be the promised paradise for the righteous and the pure. However, it seems that it actually was not heaven, but rather a peaceful garden situated in a very green and lush area of earth because:

- the promised paradise has everlasting blessings, where various verses have mentioned its everlasting and endless quality, and leaving it is not possible,
- the corrupt and faithless Satan will have no room in that heaven, nor will his whispers of temptation, or any sort of disobedience to God will have a place.
- prophetic traditions, which have been passed down to us from the Ahlul Bayt, explicitly talk about this topic. One of the narrators of Prophet's traditions says that he asked Imam Sadiq about the heaven Adam resided in. Imam replied, "It was a garden, of the gardens of earth where the sun and moon shone upon it, and if it were the promised paradise, Adam would have never left it."²²

Moreover, it is clear that Adam's descent and fall to earth was a descent in rank and not in location. He fell from his great status and rank and from that green and prosperous garden.

The assumption has also been made that this heaven was on a planet in the sky even though it was not

the promised paradise. Some hadiths indicate that this heaven was in the skies; however, it is probable that the word “سما” (sky) in these sorts of narrations indicates ‘a high rank’ and not a high location.

Nonetheless, many sources prove that this heaven was something other than the promised paradise. The promised paradise comes at the end of the journey of mankind, whereas this heaven was at the beginning or middle of Adam’s journey of life. This heaven was the beginning of his deeds and actions, whereas the promised paradise is to be the conclusion of deeds and actions.²³

In regards to this, Allamah Tabatabai emphasizes that the implication of heaven is not the heaven in the hereafter. With the use of proof from narrations, he states that the meaning of heaven is a purgatory one.²⁴

Those addressed to descend in the Quran

Throughout the story of Adam, God commanded descent many times, where in one instance He commanded descent in the singular form:

قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ

‘Get down from it!’ He said. ‘It is not for you to be arrogant therein. Begone! You are indeed among the degraded ones.’²⁵

It is clear that only Satan is the one being addressed here. In another case, God commands descent in the dual form:

قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ

He said, ‘Get down both of you from it, all together, being enemies of one another!’²⁶

Once again, it is also clear here that the people addressed are Adam and Eve.

In three cases God commands descent in the plural form:

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ ۖ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ

﴿ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴾

Then Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what they were in; and We said, ‘Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time.’²⁷

God’s command of descent to Adam and Eve comes in the plural form here. Quranic commentators have different opinions regarding the individuals addressed in this verse.

In some exegeses, Adam, Eve, and Satan are understood to be the ones addressed.²⁸ In other exegeses Adam, Eve, and the whisperers of temptation are said to be the target audience²⁹. Other commentators believe that the addressees are Adam, Eve, and their descendants; in other words, if we exile a man and woman from a land, we have also exiled any child that may be produced by them.³⁰ Other Quranic commentators consider Adam and Eve to be the only addressees, where in this case they argue that according to Arabic customs, the verb has just come in the plural form “طواهب”³¹

Repetition of Descent in the Chapter ‘The Cow’ (al-Baqarah)

In the chapter –The Cow, the command to descend to earth was given to both Adam and Eve before and after repentance. The following opinions have been noted with respect to the repeated command to descend and whether the descent only took place once:

- Jabai says that the first descent differs from the second one. The first was a descent from heaven to the skies of earth, and the second a descent from the skies to earth.³²
- The descent has been repeated for emphasis.³³
- Repetition of the descent was because each descent had a command with different purpose; the first descent speaks of them becoming enemies amongst each other; the second descent expresses that whoever obeys God, He will guide them and whoever disobeys Him will become miserable.³⁴
- In other words, the first command to descend was given before repentance where the end of descent was described as their becoming enemy of each other. However, the second command to descent was given after repentance and before they were expelled from heaven, where with repenting, their lives in this world became accompanied with the guidance from God.³⁵
- Repeating the command of descent was to make Adam and Eve aware that the command to descend had not changed. Thus, after repenting, which took place between the two commands to descend, they thought their descent to earth had become nullified. Hence, the command of descent was repeated to make them aware of the continuation of the previous command and to help them realize the oath of:

‘Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth’³⁶

In the Torah

Before explaining the matter of descent in the Torah, it is interesting to know that the current Torah mentions certain punishments for Adam, Eve and the serpent.

The serpent's punishment according to the Torah:

*So the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'*³⁷

The following has also come in regards to Eve's punishment:

*To the woman he said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'*³⁸

The Torah explains the talk between God and Adam and his punishment as such:

To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.' Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."³⁹

Finally, the current Torah says the following about the issue of descent:

*So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*⁴⁰

It is interesting to know that in other Jewish text, the outcome of eating the fruit from the forbidden tree is death:

Death is the result of sinning, and if an individual never commits a sin, naturally he will never die...the angels said the following before the holy essence: O Lord of the universe why did you appoint the punishment of death for Adam? God replied in answer: I gave him an easy task and he violated it. Whenever someone asks of you if Adam – the human did not transgress and eat from the forbidden tree, would he have lived forever and stayed immortal or not, in response to him say that Elijah the prophet

*never transgressed and he lived forever.*⁴¹

In another text we read:

*God did not make death, and He does not delight in the death of the living. For He created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth.*⁴²

According to the Jewish commentary, man fell captive to death through his descent to earth, a death that he would not have succumbed to if he had not sinned. If Adam had not sinned, the entire Torah would have been revealed to him, given that some of rules and regulations had been given to Adam before the Law of Moses, like the observance of Sabbath which was obligatory from his time.⁴³

Conclusion

According to that which has been discussed, it is clear that the descent of Adam and Eve has similarities and differences in the Quran and Torah. We can see the similarities through both perspectives where pain and suffering is a consequence of descent. The following lists selected differences and similarities between the two sources:

1. The Quran: God warns Adam and Eve from Satan's deception and His plan to have them expelled from heaven. However, because of their negligence, Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan.

The Torah does not include any warning from God in regards to the serpent, the whispers of temptation, or deception.

2. The Quran includes a record of Satan's animosity towards Adam: after refusing to prostrate and being reprimanded by God. Satan declares Adam and his children to be his enemy.

The Torah includes no such record or history of hatred between the serpent and Adam or Eve.

3. The Torah: Eve was deceived.

The Quran: In one instance Adam alone was said to be deceived, and in the chapter – The Elevations – Adam and Eve were both said to be deceived.

4. The Torah: God orders them not to approach the "fruit tree".

The Quran: God order them not to approach the "tree".

5. The Torah: The tree is the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The Quran: From what is deduced from Satan's talk with Adam and Eve, the tree was the tree of immortality.

6. The Torah: The result of eating from the tree's fruit is said to be death.

The Quran: The result of eating from the fruit was becoming corrupt and expulsion from heaven.

7. The Torah: After eating the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve did not die, meaning that what God said in regards to eating from the fruit of the tree did not happen.

The Quran: That which God warned took place and they were expelled from heaven.

8. In both the Quran and Torah, the result of eating from the tree led to the revealing of Adam and Eve's private parts.

9. In both the Quran and Torah Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves; however, the type of leaves is specified in the Torah – from a fig tree – whereas the type of leaves is unstated in the Quran.

10. In both divine books, Adam and Eve descended to earth.

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جنة من جنات الدنيا يطلع فيها الشمس و القمر و لو كان من جنات الآخرة خرج منها أبدا
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29. Majma al-Bayan, vol. 1, pg. 138
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32. Fakhr Razi, *ibid.*, vol. 3, pg. 26
33. Zamakhshari, Mahmud, al-Kashaf, vol. 1, pg. 129; Qurtubi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, al-Jami li- Ahkam al-Quran, vol. 1, pg. 323
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