

Paradise and Hell in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments: A Comparative Analytical Study of the Sayings of the People of the Book

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ABSTRACT

This research compares and analyzes the beliefs about Paradise and Hell from the perspective of the People of the Book in comparison to the Holy Quran's description of these same concepts. Each of these divine scriptures also has an opinion on this duality, which is one representation of the general concept of reward vs. punishment within religious thought. The study is divided into two parts: Part I discusses some important terms and concepts including what the Paradise-Hell duality means and a definition for the Two Testaments and the People of the Book; the second is based upon an Analytical Study which aims at discovering the true essence of the said concepts and how they appear in Divine Scriptures with a view to pointing out the likeness as well as the difference among the Quranic verses on the one side, and the Torah and Gospel verses on the other." "In this respect, the Researcher has used Descriptive- Analytic Method; and it was found that Quran is clear and comprehensive than other divine scripture. The dual nature that is seen within its verses and in many different settings serves as an important part of the basic structure of Islam's beliefs—this duality is also present in the Old Testament and New Testament but less prevalent than in the Quran. The fact that this duality exists in all three does not mean they are identical.

Keywords: Paradise, Hellfire, the Holy Quran, the Torah, the Gospel, People of the Book.

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Introduction:

One of the most common and universal cosmic dualities has been the concept of paradise/hell. In fact, many scholars believe the entire cosmos is based on a principle of duality. This principle exists because everything we can see or feel is either paired with an opposite¹. In addition, the fact that one pole exists confirms that the other pole also exists regardless of whether or not the latter pole is present. Therefore, since the divine religions (Old Testament, New Testament, Qur'an) all have a reward/punishment relationship, they will all define Heaven based on definitions of Hell; both concepts exist in the Old Testament and New Testament but the Qur'an describes the nature of heaven and hell, how individuals enter each.

The Qur'an encompasses the teachings of the divinely revealed scriptures that preceded it, elucidates the divine law, and delineates its governing framework. In doing so, it represents an explicit call for the establishment of a unified frame of reference and the cultivation of human relations that affirm the unity of humankind. This, however, does not entail the negation of the revelations preceding the Qur'an. As al-'Utaybī observes:

“Doctrinal, civilizational, and cultural particularities cannot simply be effaced. Islam, however, does not intend such particularities to hinder mutual understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples. Such cooperation is subject to the practical principles of sharī'ah-based governance, as determined by qualified holders of authority (ahl al-ḥall wa-l-'aqd) possessing expertise, knowledge, and religious learning.”²

¹ Samar al-Dayyūb, *Al-Thunā'iyāt al-Diddiyyah: Baḥṭh fī al-Muṣṭalaḥ wa-Dalālātihi* [Binary Oppositions: A Study of the Term and Its Significations], 1st ed. (Islamic Centre for Strategic Studies, 2017), p. 23.

² Ahmed Al-Otaibi, “Religious and Social Coexistence in Islam and Its Contemporary Challenges: A Da'wah and Jurisprudential Study,”

In light of the foregoing, we have chosen to conduct the present study, entitled:

Paradise and Hell in the Qur'an and the Two Testaments: A Comparative Analytical Study of the Sayings of the People of the Book

This study is undertaken in an attempt to harmonize the divinely revealed scriptures and affirm that they mutually reinforce one another in both content and guidance. The notion of Paradise and Hell has been selected for applied analysis as a binary inherent in the divinely revealed belief systems, which address, either directly or indirectly, the reward of believers and the punishment of disbelievers.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of the present study stems from its novelty, as it seeks to trace the treatment of the notion of Paradise and Hell in the Torah and the Gospel and compare it with that found in the Qur'an. Examining this issue can contribute significantly to elucidating points of convergence and divergence at the core of these divinely revealed belief systems. The view of paradise as a reward and hell as a punishment, reflects how much justice is practiced and how well the retribution (recompense) is put into practice, in each of these religious belief systems. It can also show how much commitment and self-discipline are developed in each religion, with those who believe awaiting their reward, while those who do not believe will be punished without escape. Thus, the doctrine provides a conceptual structure that can guide actions and beliefs related to this life and the afterlife, and provide support for faith.

Research Questions:

"The study is guided by the following central question":

"What are the points of similarity and difference between the Qur'anic account of

Paradise and Hell and that of the People of the Book"?

"This central question gives rise to the following sub-questions":

- Conceptualizations of Paradise & Hell through a Human Culture Perspective.
- What does it mean to have an Old Testament/New Testament; and what does the term "People of the Book" denote?
- Similarities with respect to the accounts of Paradise & Hell as described in the Qur'an (Old and New Testaments).
- Differences from one another in regards to Paradise & Hell descriptions as outlined in the Qur'an and Old/New Testaments.

Research Objectives:

"The study seeks to achieve the following objectives":

- Paradise and Hell will be explained by comparing the major views on both that have been expressed.
- Similarities of accounts for Paradise and Hell in all three divine scriptures (Old Testament, New Testament, & Quran) will be identified.
- Differences of accounts regarding Paradise and Hell as described in the Old Testament/New Testament/Qur'an will be identified.

Research Methodology:

The research is conducted using a Descriptive-Analytical method; it has two components: A theoretical-descriptive one, which describes and explains the concepts that are important for this research, and An Analytic Component, which is based on a Comparative Study of Divine Scriptur

Structure of the Study:

Section One

The Key Concepts of the Study

The purpose of this study is to define a set of key terms which will serve as a framework for the research project, help outline the scope of

the project and provide clarity on the meaning of each term. Section One is devoted to elucidating these concepts, whereas Section Two presents the applied analytical component through the examination and analysis of selected passages from sacred texts. This analysis seeks to identify the similarities and differences among the divinely revealed scriptures in their treatment of the notion of Paradise and Hell.

Subsection One: The Concepts of Paradise and Hell in Human Culture

myths developed around it in antiquity, and it acquired a sacred character in many ancient non-revealed religions. Zoroastrianism, for example, regarded fire as the spark of life, light, truth, and divinity³. This conception continued within the divinely revealed religions, as reflected in Jewish culture, which regarded fire with reverence and veneration. Such symbolism is evident in the Qur'anic account of the Prophet Moses⁴ and in the manifestation of the Divine Essence to the mountain in the form of fire. This further intensified the sacred status of fire and surrounded it with an aura that elevated its general standing and significance. Within this worldview, it was held that "whatever constitutes benefit, goodness, and blessing belongs to the categories of light, whereas whatever entails harm, evil, and corruption belongs to the categories of darkness."⁵

Fire likewise assumed this sacred character within Islamic culture, while the Qur'an also drew attention to its importance in human life⁶.

³ Zuhair Kadhim Abboud, *Zoroastrianism*, Baghdad, 2015, p. 20.

⁴ This is mentioned more than once in the Qur'anic account of Moses. One example is the following verse: "When he saw a fire and said to his family, 'Remain here; indeed, I have perceived a fire. Perhaps I may bring you a firebrand from it or find guidance at the fire.'" (Surah Taha, verse 10).

⁵ Muhammad al-Shahrastani, *Religions and Sects*, Mustafa Library, Cairo, vol. 1, 1976, p. 247.

⁶ One example is the following statement of God Almighty: "He who produced for you fuel from the green trees, with which you kindle fire." (Surah Ya-

Paradise, by contrast, did not occupy the same degree of prominence as Hell, nor was it represented with comparable clarity. This does not, however, imply its absence, since the presence of Hell implicitly presupposes the presence of Paradise within humanity's deep cultural structure. This becomes particularly apparent when Hell is considered within the reward–punishment binary found across various religions. As one scholar observes: “Indeed, God Almighty is merciful and forbearing toward His servants. In His Book, He informed them of the reward of the obedient and the punishment of the disobedient in order to inspire them to perform acts of obedience and refrain from prohibited acts. God juxtaposed the two in more

than one verse, placing both alternatives before His servants so that they might choose their destiny.”⁷ This principle applies to all divinely revealed religions, not only to Islam.

If we examine the meanings of reward and punishment, we find that reward is defined as “a pure benefit accompanied by honor.”⁸ This definition corresponds to the concept of Paradise, which has conventionally been expressed by this term, or by other expressions suggestive of it, in the various divinely revealed scriptures. Arabic lexicographical sources derive the term al-jannah from the linguistic root j-n-n, which conveys the meaning of concealment or covering. Al-Jannah was so named because its densely interwoven trees and foliage provide concealment. Similarly, a child in its mother's womb is called a janīn because it is concealed

within the womb, while junūn al-layl denotes the concealment brought about by night. Thus, “al-jannah is a garden, so called because a tree conceals with its foliage. Some maintain that, in Arabic usage, al-jannah refers to tall palm trees.”⁹

Ibn Faris states that the root j-n-n has the primary meaning of concealment¹⁰. Ibn Manzur similarly notes: “Janna al-shay'a yajunnuhu jannan: he concealed it.”¹¹ Thus, the principal lexical meaning of the term is concealment. It subsequently developed into a technical term in religious cultures, referring to a hidden, unseen realm that constitutes the abode of recompense and reward. The term became particularly widespread in Islamic culture, perhaps because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. The Qur'an employs Arabic words according to their established meanings and in a manner that conveys the meanings intended within the Qur'anic context. When the Torah and the Gospel were translated into Arabic, translators selected the term al-jannah to designate the unseen abode in which people receive their reward. The underlying concept is therefore essentially the same, even though it is expressed through different terms. Ibn Faris defines al-jannah in its technical sense as “that to which Muslims will proceed in the hereafter; it is a reward presently concealed from them.”¹²

He thus defines al-jannah according to its Islamic cultural meaning. Ibn Manzur likewise defines it as follows:

“It is the abode of bliss in the Hereafter. The term derives from ijtinan, meaning concealment,

Sin, verse 80). This Qur'anic verse demonstrates that fire constitutes a blessing in human life, as it is essential to many industries and to the provision of warmth, light, and other necessities of human existence.

⁷ Al-Juraish, “Reward and Punishment in the Light of the Holy Qur'an: An Applied Study,” *Midad Al-Adab Journal*, no. 42, p. 807.

⁸ Abu al-Baqā al-Hanafī, *Al-Kullīyyat [The Universals]*, edited by Adnan Darwish and Muhammad al-Masri, Al-Risalah Foundation, Beirut, n.d., p. 327.

⁹ Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah [Standards of the Language]*, edited by Abd al-Salam Harun, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1979, vol. 1, p. 421.

¹⁰ Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah [Standards of the Language]*, vol. 1, p. 421.

¹¹ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab [The Tongue of the Arabs]*, edited by Ali al-Kabir et al., Dar al-Ma'arif, 2nd ed., n.d., vol. 8, p. 701, entry “j-n-n.”

¹² Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah [Standards of the Language]*, vol. 1, p. 421.

because of the density of its trees and the shade created by their interwoven branches.”¹³

This definition may be understood as encompassing the concept of reward in the hereafter across various religious cultures, whether non-revealed or divinely revealed, since the notion of reward is embodied in Paradise.

Paradise has also been defined as “the place that God has prepared for His righteous servants after death, resurrection, and judgment as a reward for them; it belongs to the realm of the unseen.”¹⁴

This definition is likewise grounded in Islamic culture and reflects a principle shared with earlier religions: that created beings are subject to reward and punishment.

This leads us to the other pole of the reward–punishment binary, namely punishment, which is defined as “the infliction of pain in consequence of a prior offense.”¹⁵ Human culture has traditionally represented this idea through the image of fire. The Arabic term *al-nar* derives from the linguistic root *n-w-r*, which is described as “a sound root denoting illumination, agitation, and instability.”¹⁶ This semantic definition accords with the nature of fire, which embodies these qualities. The noun *al-nar* is grammatically feminine, and its *alif* was originally a *waw*, as evidenced by its diminutive form, *nuwayrah*¹⁷.

This brief review shows how Paradise and Hell are key figures in religious culture as a

manifestation of reward and punishment through the lens of a reward-punishment binary.

Subsection Two: Defining the Old and New Testaments and the People of the Book

By the two Testaments, we mean the Old Testament, represented by the Torah, and the New Testament, represented by the Gospel. The Old Testament developed over successive historical periods and comprises material transmitted orally by Jewish rabbis and recorded in several books that underwent numerous revisions. Its sacred authenticity is therefore regarded as uncertain, since linguistic errors and textual alterations affected its transmission. Moreover, its textual form was not fixed until the final three centuries before the Common Era¹⁸.

The Old Testament comprises several books, conventionally classified into the Books of the Law, the Historical Books, the Poetic Books, the Prophetic Books, and the Canonical Books¹⁹.

The Near East constituted the geographical and cultural setting in which the Old Testament emerged. Within this context, the Jewish people interacted with members of other cultures, including the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Canaanites²⁰.

The New Testament, by contrast, is represented by the Gospel. It emerged alongside Christianity, which began with the birth of Christ and the commencement of the Christian era. Accordingly, the New Testament took shape during the first century CE²¹.

The New Testament is closely connected with its predecessor and consists of a collection of

¹³ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab* [The Tongue of the Arabs], vol. 8, pp. 705–706, entry “j-n-n.”

¹⁴ Safaa Hassan Latif, “The Lexical Semantics of the Terms Paradise and Hell and Their Synonyms in the Qur’an,” p. 183.

¹⁵ Zayn al-Din al-Munawi, *Al-Tawqif ‘ala Muhimmat al-Ta’arif* [Clarification of Important Definitions], Alam al-Kutub, Cairo, 1st ed., 1990, p. 244.

¹⁶ Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah* [Standards of the Language], vol. 5, p. 368.

¹⁷ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab* [The Tongue of the Arabs], vol. 48, p. 4572, entry “n-w-r.”

¹⁸ See Ahmed Abdul-Wahhab Ali, *The Books of the Old Testament*, p. 12; Murad Kamil, *The Historical Books of the Old Testament*, p. 21.

¹⁹ See “Index of the Sacred Books,” *The World Encyclopedia*, p. 17; Ra’fat Shawqi, *Studies in the Old Testament*, p. 230.

²⁰ See Martin Sauvage, *Historical Atlas of the Ancient Near East*, p. 13.

²¹ See Maurice Tawadros, *Theological and Linguistic Studies in the New Testament*, p. 1.

books. It includes the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as well as the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, and the Book of Revelation²².

The concept of the “People of the Book” is an Islamic religious concept derived from the Qur’an, which employs the expression on several occasions to refer to Jews in some contexts, Christians in others, and both communities collectively elsewhere. Consequently, Qur’anic exegetes classified Jews and Christians as the People of the Book and interpreted the Qur’anic verses containing this expression accordingly. Some exegetes also extended this designation to Zoroastrians and Sabians²³.

Restricting the designation to Jews and Christians appears more consistent with historical reality, since they are the followers of the prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them), to whom the divinely revealed scriptures—the Torah and the Gospel—were respectively revealed.

Muslim jurists maintained that the People of the Book comprise “those who stand outside the ḥanīf faith and Islamic law but profess a religious law with its own rulings, prescribed limits, and distinctive symbols. They are divided into those who possess an established scripture, such as the Torah and the Gospel—whom the Qur’anic revelation addresses as the People of the Book—and those who possess the semblance of a scripture, such as the Zoroastrians.”²⁴

In general, the expression “People of the Book” may be understood broadly as encompassing adherents of religions other than Islam, since most religions—whether non-revealed or divinely revealed—possess scriptures containing their laws and precepts. The word “Judeo-

Christian” has been used throughout this project to refer to the two faiths that are based on the Holy Bible.

Section Two

"A Comparative Study of the Concepts of Paradise and Hell in the Qur’an and the Old and New Testaments"

As stated previously, this pair is a continuation of the divine structure for reward/punishment and will be treated in each of the divinely revealed scripture texts. This section assesses the treatments of these two concepts within each scriptural text; then it will identify similarities/differences among the treatments given to them by the authors of the Old/New Testament texts and those from the Qur’an. Therefore, this assessment will follow the sequence:

Subsection One: "Paradise and Hell in the Old and New Testaments in Light of the Qur’anic Discourse on the People of the Book"

Despite their differences, the divinely revealed religions have articulated their respective conceptions of Paradise as reward and Hell as punishment. These conceptions appear to derive from belief in divine justice, according to which the believer must be rewarded and the disbeliever punished. Thus, the principle of divine justice constitutes the foundation of both concepts.

If we consider the divinely revealed religions in their historical sequence, we find that Judaism makes no explicit reference to the afterlife and does not discuss, for example, the Day of Resurrection. Nevertheless, passing allusions to life after death can be found, including the following passage in the Torah:

“And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the

²² See Maurice Tawadros, *Theological and Linguistic Studies in the New Testament*, p. 1.

²³ See al-Zuhayli, *Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Proofs*, vol. 7, p. 162.

²⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *Religions and Sects*, vol. 1, p. 24.

midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”²⁵

This verse from the Torah presents a material depiction of life after death through its portrayal of Paradise in its lexical sense as a garden filled with luxuriant trees. The Lord’s bringing forth of these trees conveys both their physical attributes—“pleasant to the sight and good for food”—and their spiritual and symbolic dimensions, represented by “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Paradise is thus depicted in the Torah as a realm whose inhabitants enjoy both material and spiritual blessings.

The Qur’an also refers to the People of the Book’s conception of Paradise. They regarded Hell as a temporary punishment, after which they believed they would enter Paradise. This view is reflected in the following verse:

“That is because they said, ‘The Fire will not touch us except for a limited number of days.’ They were deceived in their faith by the lies they fabricated.”²⁶

The Qur’an portrays the concepts of Paradise and Hell, from the perspective of the People of the Book, primarily in temporal terms. It does not emphasize Paradise as a place of goodness or beauty; rather, within the framework of their claim, it presents Paradise as marking the end of punishment. They maintain that their stay in Hell will be brief and that they will subsequently enter Paradise²⁷.

The Qur’an may also be understood as portraying the mockery and defiance displayed by the People of the Book, who seek to demonstrate their indifference to punishment in the Hereafter. This is reflected in the following divine statement:

“Yet these say, there is nothing beyond our first death, and we will not be resurrected.”²⁸

In these two verses, the Qur’an refers to the People of the Book’s denial of the Hereafter and, consequently, their rejection of the concepts of Paradise and Hell. Their position directly conflicts with their own scripture. Therefore, it shows that their conviction in doctrine and their belief is weak.

Paradise is referred to by the Qur’an as an idea of the People of the Book. The people of the book (Jews, Christians) viewed hellfire as a temporary punishment that was followed by their entrance into paradise. This idea of entering heaven after being punished for a time is found in the verse below:

They also claim that ‘No one will be allowed to enter heaven except for Jews or Christians.’ That is what they want. Tell them, ‘If you really believe in this, show me the evidence.’²⁹

The Qur’anic discourse uses logical reasoning to oppose their claims. By doing this, the Qur’an shows that their statement is false (without evidence), as well as the selfishness and wishful thinking of those who are referred to as “People of the Book.”

There is another passage in the Torah that refers to the location of Paradise as follows:

“The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and preserve it”³⁰

This passage suggests that the Garden of Eden (Paradise) exists as a tangible location somewhere either in Yemen or Jerusalem. Therefore, it should be understood to exist in a physical sense rather than being some abstract, invisible realm. One commentary explains as follows:

Eden’s exact location is unknown; there have been many diverse views about its placement.

²⁵ Genesis 2:9.

²⁶ Surah Āl ‘Imrān, verse 24.

²⁷ Nasir Makarim al-Shirazi, *Al-Amthal fi Tafsir Kitab Allah al-Munzal* [The Exemplary Commentary on the Revealed Book of God], vol. 1, p. 194.

²⁸ Surah al-Dukhān, verses 34–35.

²⁹ Surah al-Baqarah, verse 111.

³⁰ Genesis 2:15.

There may have existed an actual Paradise, which would have had to have existed outside the Holy Land, in Western Asia. Possibly, this paradise would have existed at the head of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers or among their respective tributary streams.³¹

It therefore seems to follow from these findings that Paradise as depicted by the Torah is a place with definite spatial limits, while in the Quran it is infinite, and therefore can never be seen or otherwise perceived using our five sense. This is explicitly stated in the following Qur'anic verse:

“And race towards forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth: prepared for the cautious.”³²

The verse demonstrates that Paradise is one of God's creations, as indicated by the word “prepared”; that its expanse is unlimited, as expressed in the phrase “whose breadth is as vast as the heavens and the earth”; and that it is intended for the God-conscious. By contrast, the Torah assigns Paradise a tangible physical location and presents the Prophet Adam as its inhabitant and builder. Adam (peace be upon him) may here be understood as a symbol of humankind as a whole.

The Torah also states that Paradise contains four rivers, as recorded in Genesis:

“A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided into four branches ... The name of the third river was Hiddekel, which flows east of Assyria, and the fourth was the Euphrates.”³³

This passage from the Torah names the rivers of Paradise, whose depiction is predominantly material. Some are assigned a specific geographical location, such as the river “flowing east of Assyria,” whereas others, such as the

Euphrates, exist in the earthly realm. By contrast, the Qur'anic description of the rivers of Paradise is not geographically specific; rather, it is general and imbues them with qualities of sacredness, grandeur, delight, and beauty. This is illustrated in the following verse:

“The likeness of the Garden promised to the righteous: in it are rivers of pure water, and rivers of milk forever fresh, and rivers of wine delightful to the drinkers, and rivers of strained honey. And they will have in it of every fruit, and forgiveness from their Lord. Like someone remaining in the Fire forever, and are given to drink boiling water, that tears apart their bowels?”³⁴

This verse illustrates the various forms of pleasure and bounty encompassed by Paradise. The Qur'an provides an extensive description of the rivers of Paradise because such imagery is intended to encourage righteous conduct and faith in God as the means of attaining this goodness and beauty. By contrast, the Torah assigns Paradise a specific geographical location. This may likewise serve an exhortative purpose by lending the description a sense of realism, as though it were depicting an actual place.

Nevertheless, the evocation of pleasure may be more compelling than the identification of a particular location and may leave a deeper impression on the human psyche. Accordingly, the Talmud also reminds its readers of the blessings awaiting the inhabitants of Paradise, thereby fulfilling the intended purpose of encouraging virtuous conduct and discouraging wrongdoing.

Paradise, according to Qur'anic commentators, cannot be found on this earth; it is a heavenly dwelling that Allah has prepared in the afterlife for believers.

The portrayal of Hell in the Torah is depicted at a lower level than the depiction of Heaven; however, it appears in its role as an afterlife punishment. It was established during a later time frame of approximately the last 300 years

³¹ William Marsh, *Al-Sunan al-Qawim fi Tafsir Asfar al-'Ahd al-Qadim (Safar al-Takwin)* [The Sound Approach to the Interpretation of the Books of the Old Testament (Genesis)], Near East Council of Churches, Beirut, 1973, p. 43.

³² Surah Āl 'Imrān, verse 133.

³³ Genesis 2:10–14.

³⁴ Surah Muḥammad, verse 15.

before Christianity (a timeframe which correlates with the compilation of the Old Testament). According to the Torah, when life on earth ends one's soul goes to the "Sheol" or underworld located below the earth.³⁵

This contributed to a sense of fear and aversion toward death among the Jews. Such fear may have lain behind certain textual alterations, additions, or claims that Paradise was reserved exclusively for them. The Qur'an addresses this claim and challenges them through the following verses:

"Say, 'If the Final Home with Allah is yours alone, to the exclusion of all other people, then wish for death if you are truthful. But they will never wish for it, because of what their hands have forwarded. And Allah is aware of the unjust.'"³⁶

The Qur'an employs the expression "the abode of the Hereafter" to refer to Paradise and challenges the Jewish claim through an argument that demonstrates the contrary. Paradise is not reserved exclusively for any particular people; rather, it is intended for believers and the God-conscious who perform righteous deeds and refrain from wrongdoing.

The Qur'an further demonstrates the invalidity of the Jewish claim in the following verse:

"You will find them, of all humankind, the most eager for life, even more than the associators. Every one of them wishes to live a thousand years, but to be granted a long life will not nudge him from the punishment. Allah sees everything they do."³⁷

The verse points to their attachment to worldly life and implicitly advances a logical argument: if Paradise were reserved exclusively for the People of the Book, why would they cling so strongly to worldly life and fear death? Qur'anic exegetes have observed that the word "life"

(*ḥayāh*) occurs here in the indefinite form, thereby conveying generality. It is as though they desire life in whatever form it may take; even if it is humiliating, difficult, or harsh, they remain attached to it and seek to prolong it indefinitely³⁸.

The Paradise–Hell binary likewise appears in the New Testament within the framework of reward and punishment: Paradise is the abode of the righteous, whereas Hell is the abode of the wicked. This is expressed in the Gospel of Matthew:

"And they will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father ..."³⁹

This passage contrasts two opposing states: that of the inhabitants of Hell, who are overcome by fear and remorse, symbolized by "weeping and gnashing of teeth," and that of the inhabitants of Paradise—the righteous—who attain exaltation and a lofty status, symbolized by their radiance "like the sun."

Paradise is referred to in the Gospel by several designations, including *al-firdaws* ("Paradise"):

"Truly I say to you: today you will be with Me in Paradise."⁴⁰

The term *al-firdaws* also occurs in the Qur'an. It is not Arabic in origin but derives from Persian, where it denotes a garden⁴¹. Its lexical meaning thus corresponds to that of the Arabic term *al-jannah*.

The New Testament portrays Paradise as the abode of the Lord and the saints. An example appears in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians:

³⁸ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 604 AH), *Mafatih al-Ghayb* [Keys to the Unseen], Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 3rd ed., 1405 AH/1985 CE, vol. 3, p. 28.

³⁹ The Gospel of Matthew 13:42–43.

⁴⁰ The Gospel of Luke 23:43.

⁴¹ James Hawkes, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Asatir Publishing House, Tehran, p. 647.

³⁵ Georges Minois, *History of Hell*, translated by Antoine al-Hashim, Oueidat, Beirut, 1st ed., 1996, p. 42.

³⁶ Surah al-Baqarah, verses 94–95.

³⁷ Surah al-Baqarah, verse 96.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”⁴²

This passage indicates that they will be united with Jesus in Paradise. Such an idea does not appear among the statements attributed to the People of the Book in the Qur’an. This omission may be understood in light of the Islamic conception of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) as a prophet rather than a deity; accordingly, he is present in Paradise together with the believers. The New Testament, by contrast, portrays him as divine and as dwelling in Paradise with his followers. From the interpretive perspective adopted here, such a conception may be regarded as compromising divine transcendence.

The Qur’an also refers to the goodness and bliss that believers will experience in Paradise, as stated in the following verse:

“No fatigue will ever touch them there, nor will they be asked to leave.”⁴³

Paradise is therefore an eternal abode: once believers enter it, they will never leave.

The Christian tradition follows the Torah in its depiction of the bliss of Paradise, as illustrated by the following passage:

“That you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”⁴⁴

The Gospel passage depicts God’s invitation to his followers to share in blessings and goodness and to remain in his company in the abode of bliss. The Qur’an likewise frequently refers to these material manifestations of the bliss of Paradise, as in the following verse:

“And We will supply them with fruit, and meat, as they desire.”⁴⁵

This is a purely material depiction centered on the pleasures enjoyed by the inhabitants of Paradise. It serves as a form of exhortation to adhere to divine law, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong.

Subsection Two: Comparative Analysis

The preceding discussion of Paradise and Hell in the Old and New Testaments and the Qur’anic discourse on the People of the Book demonstrates that the three divinely revealed scriptures—the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur’an—affirm life after death and the principles of reward and punishment. They further maintain that a person’s deeds in this world determine whether that person merits Paradise or Hell. This conception is grounded in the principle of divine justice, according to which not even an atom’s weight of human action, whether good or evil, can go unaccounted for.

The points of difference lie in each religious tradition’s conception of the nature of Paradise and Hell. The Old Testament portrays Paradise as a material, geographically bounded place situated on earth and reserved exclusively for the Jews. The New Testament, by contrast, presents it as a reward characterized by spiritual bliss, in which Jesus shares the blessings of Paradise with his followers.

A fundamental difference becomes apparent in the conception of Paradise and Hell in the two Testaments, since “the Torah as it exists in the hands of Jews and Christians contains no explicit account of resurrection, rising from the dead, or recompense after death.”⁴⁶ Life after death is mentioned without any detailed explanation or clarification of the characteristics of that stage of existence. One example is the following passage from the Old Testament:

“The Lord tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and those who love violence.

⁴² Philippians 4:7.

⁴³ Surah al-Ĥijr, verse 48.

⁴⁴ The Gospel of Luke 22:30.

⁴⁵ Surah al-Ṭūr, verse 22.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar* [Al-Manar Qur’anic Commentary], Egyptian General Book Organization, 1990, vol. 10, p. 252.

Upon the wicked He will rain snares, fire, and brimstone.”⁴⁷

This passage presents worldly life as a form of trial and subsequently describes how the wicked are punished and consigned to the Fire. However, it provides no clear account of the characteristics of that stage of existence.

This may be explained by the fact that “the principle of reward and punishment in the Jewish Torah is based primarily on recompense in this world.”⁴⁸ Accordingly, the People of the Book exhibit a strong attachment to worldly life, a characteristic to which the Qur’an refers and which it invokes in its argumentation against them, as discussed above.

The Qur’an, by contrast, elucidates the exalted status, vastness, and material pleasures of Paradise, including its rivers, food, and various forms of comfort. Paradise constitutes an eternal reward without end and is entered by the God-conscious who perform righteous deeds. The Qur’an states:

“Their Lord gives them the good news of mercy from Him, and acceptance, and Gardens where they will have lasting bliss. To stay there forever. With Allah is a great reward.”⁴⁹

Paradise is therefore a state of eternal bliss without end⁵⁰.

One notable feature is the Qur’an’s extensive and varied portrayal of the bliss of Paradise and the torment of Hell across numerous verses. Collectively, these passages affirm the complementary principles of encouragement and deterrence (*targhīb wa-tarhīb*) upon which most religions are founded. These principles embody divine mercy, which seeks to protect human beings from punishment through

warning and guide them toward reward through encouragement.

This confirms that the concepts of Paradise and Hell are deeply rooted in religious thought and reflect human nature and the innate disposition that anticipates an ultimate outcome for all things. Religions broadly agree that divine justice operates according to human conduct: every person is rewarded for righteous deeds and punished for wrongful ones.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the concepts of Paradise and Hell are not new to religious thought; rather, they emerged alongside the earliest formation of religious beliefs. While each religion has an individual way to express the duality of Paradise/Hell, all religions agree that Paradise and Hell are a result of the Reward/Punishment Duality. This study's major findings can be described as follows:

- Paradise – Hell is a concept that expresses the idea of reward/punishment (both in a material sense) which are commonalities among all of the divinely-revealed religions.
- Paradise – Hell was formed as a representation of God’s Justice (the principle). Although the various descriptions of Paradise and Hell in the Bible (Old & New Testament), and Qur’an evolved from this same principle; they also represent a commonality/point of agreement between the two Bibles, and the people of the book according to the Qur’an.
- Paradise is used to encourage people, while Hell has been depicted as a deterrent for people to follow God’s will. In this regard, depiction of both the manifestation and pleasures of Paradise, and the suffering or flames of Hell are an important element of that encouragement.
- Both the Old and New Testament portrayals of the afterlife differ from the Quran in the degree of detail provided. Both testaments mention it but do not elaborate on it much. However, many verses of the Quran have specific details about what happens in the afterlife.

⁴⁷ Psalms 11:5–6.

⁴⁸ Ismail Abd al-Rahman, “The Doctrinal Impact of the Qur’an on Jewish Aggadah Literature: Paradise and Hell as a Case Study,” *Journal of Sharia Sciences and Islamic Studies*, no. 87, 2021, p. 714.

⁴⁹ Surah al-Tawbah, verses 21–22.

⁵⁰ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys to the Unseen]*, vol. 16, p. 15.

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