

## Myth in the Holy Qur'an

### جایگاه اسطوره در قرآن کریم

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### Abstract

چکیده

*In the Qur'anic view, the main mission of the prophets and their heavenly books is preaching. If the Qur'an, in some cases, deals with any subject, it has only a preaching approach. If we look at the Qur'an as a book of preaching, we sometimes come across verses that seem untrue: such as the imprisonment of a people called Gog and Magog behind a dam until the Day of Judgment or the dropping of meteors to drive demons out of the sky. Allameh Tabatabai considers these two as untrue and considers the relevant verses as permissible. However, all the commentators of the Qur'an, in the last fourteen hundred years, have all considered these verses to be true, and it is a difficult claim to claim that they misunderstood the Qur'an. The competitive theory, which is discussed in this article, is that those are myths, and in preaching, there is nothing wrong with using the myths of the audience as a tool. This theory, while leaving the verses of the Qur'an on their apparent meaning that all commentators have understood over fourteen centuries, also proves the legitimacy of the Qur'an.*

موعظه در فرهنگ قرآنی، رسالت اصلی انبیاء و کتب آسمانی برشمرده شده است. ثمره موعظه‌ای تلقی کردن قرآن، آنجایی به‌طور برجسته آشکار می‌شود که به آیاتی خلاف واقع برمی‌خوریم؛ نظیر محبوس بودن قومی به نام یاجوج و ماجوج در پشت سدی تا روز قیامت و یا افکندن شهاب‌ها برای راندن شیاطین از آسمان. علامه طباطبایی این دو را خلاف واقع می‌شمارد و آیات مربوط را بر مجاز حمل می‌کند. این در حالی است که مفسران طی چهارده قرن گذشته، همگی این آیات را بر حقیقت حمل می‌کردند و ادعای اینکه آنان قرآن را اشتباه می‌فهمیدند، دشوار است. نظریه رقیبی که در این مقاله به آن پرداخته می‌شود، این است که این موارد، اسطوره‌اند و در یک بیان موعظه‌ای هیچ اشکالی ندارد که از اسطوره‌های مخاطبان استفاده ابزاری شود. این نظریه، ضمن باقی گذاشتن آیات قرآن بر معنای ظاهری‌شان که تمام مفسران طی چهارده قرن فهمیده‌اند، حقانیت قرآن را نیز ثابت می‌کند.

**Keywords:** Sermon, Myth, Allegory, Metaphor.

**کلمات کلیدی:** موعظه، اسطوره، تمثیل، مجاز.

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## Introduction

In several verses of the Holy Quran, the Quran is mentioned as a sermon. Furthermore, preaching is present in all verses of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, there is always a sermon on every subject that is spoken, including the blessings and signs of divine power and the rules, stories, and resurrection. There are also questions in such regard, for example:

**First:** Are there any false statements in the descriptions of the Qur'an, as a sermon, whether in the field of history and stories or the field of nature?

**Second:** Do descriptions containing false statements in the Qur'an interfere with the authority and legitimacy of Qur'anic statements? Is it true to use false descriptions to preach? Doesn't that invalidate the preaching itself?

**Third:** What descriptions of the Qur'an are mythical and contain false statements? How can factual propositions be distinguished from false propositions of the Qur'an?

**Fourth:** Why was it necessary to use false myths and statements in the Qur'an? Why should there be myths and false statements in a divine book? Was it not possible not to use myth and all the statements of the Qur'an to be true?

The present paper seeks to answer those questions as clearly as possible.

## 1. Background

It seems that at the beginning of Islam, there was a real view of all the stories of the Qur'an and considered all of them as real events. Gradually, however, doubts arose among the commentators of the Qur'an about the veracity of some of its stories. The same is true about the Bible. Westerners, before Muslims, have made worthy efforts to provide correct and convincing theories and justifications on topics that are considered untrue.

In this regard, one of the theories and justifications they have offered is the mythical theory of biblical descriptions. Scientists such as Ernest Cassirer, Richard Braithwaite and Winston L. King, Paul Tilich have called the language of the Bible, and in particular its stories, the language of myth (Amin, 2014: 137-138). One of the things that, in their view, has become a myth from the Bible, is the story of the creation of the world and the descent of man and desire (Hick, 2000: 183-204; Amin, *ibid*: 138). The debates that have taken place among Muslims so far about the existence of myth in the Qur'an are mostly negative.

That's, in general, they deny the existence of myth in the Qur'an and consider it to be detrimental to the legitimacy and violate the guiding purpose of the Qur'an. But some modern thinkers have confirmed the existence of myth in the Qur'an and have not considered it as a violation of the legitimacy and guiding purpose of the Qur'an. In the contemporary period, some Islamic thinkers, such as Amin Kholi and his colleague Taha Hussein (Tāhā Hussein, nd: 32), as well as Amin Kholi's student, Muhammad Ahmad Khalafullah (Khalafullah, 1999: 150), as well as Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd (Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd, 2014: 100), believe that there is a myth in the Qur'an. They consider the same cases that some commentators, such as Allameh Tabatabai, consider as metaphor and allegorical, as examples of Qur'anic myths.

Khalafullah believes that there is no connection between the mythic nature of the Qur'an and its falsehood (Khalafullah, 1999: 206-207). He considers Quranic myths as a means of transmitting true knowledge. It is thought that the main reason for accepting the existence of myth in the Qur'an is that there is no argument that it

is figurative or allegorical. But on the other hand, they do not correspond to reality. Two examples of this are the fall of meteors to drive demons out of the sky, and the confinement of the people of Gog and Magog behind the dam that Dhu al-Qarnayn built in front of them.

These two examples are significant in that they have been proven to be contrary to reality by scholarly commentators such as Allameh Tabatabai. But the cases that have not been proven to be untrue have been left out in our discussions. Of course, it should be noted that any unusual event cannot be considered untrue. Some of them, such as Satan speaking to man, or the prostration of angels to Adam, can be considered as allegory or metaphor. Others, such as the splitting of the sea and the passage of the children of Israel through it, can be considered as miracles of the prophets.

Commentators on those two themes have believed in their authenticity for the past fourteen centuries. But in the present century, some contemporary commentators, such as Allameh Tabatabai, have considered that the appearance of these verses is not a true story. Therefore, they should not be interpreted in terms of their appearance; rather, they should be considered as a kind of metaphor and allegory and interpreted with rational meanings.

For example, Allameh Tabatabai, regarding the meaning of the first theme, has stated that the heavenly lights drove the demons away from the world of angels (Tabatabā'ī, 1417: 17/125). He also stated about the second theme that the crushing of Dhu al-Qarnayn? The dam is the ineffectiveness of that dam due to the development and diversity of communication channels and through the scientific and technological development of human beings (ibid: 13/398-399). The problem

with metaphor in such cases is that metaphor is known to linguists. Metaphor is different from the truth.

However, in these two cases, which are considered metaphorical and allegorical, no analogy diverts the minds of the audience from the real meaning to the metaphorical meaning. Therefore, the commentators carried these verses to the same true meaning until the present century and did not interpret them figuratively. The novelty of the present paper is that the theory of the myth of the Qur'an in such cases is examined in more depth. At the same time, the answer to the question of whether considering the above-mentioned themes as mythical does not interfere with the legitimacy of the Qur'an will be examined more closely.

## 2. The concept of myth

The descriptions in the Qur'an can be divided into three types according to the type of realism: First, the descriptions in which real beings and events are spoken of and all its statements are under reality. They are interpreted as true or real descriptions. The second category is descriptions in which real beings and events are spoken of in allegory. Here, the allegories themselves are not intended; rather, what is allegorized is the meaning and purpose. Those types of descriptions are allegorical or figurative descriptions.

The third category is descriptions that seem to speak of real beings and events, but studies show that some of its propositions do not refer to real beings and events. Those kinds of descriptions are mythical descriptions. Ahmad Khalafullah distinguishes three different types of stories in the Qur'an. The first category is the historical stories of the Qur'an, which are stories that report real events; like the historical figures of the

prophets. The second category is allegorical stories. Stories that are imaginary and do not reflect any external reality. Those kinds of stories have a clarifying aspect. He considers the third type of Qur'anic stories to be myths that are used to express a truth far from understanding (Khalafullah, 1999: 183).

Here, myth is a description that contains untrue statements; but it does not mean that all its statements are untrue. Moreover, the meaning of the myth here is not specifically the beings and events of the past; rather, it is all beings and events, including the past, present, and future, that do not have a real aspect.

That definition includes any description in which there are false statements. Therefore, it includes both historical propositions that relate to beings and events of the past, as well as physical propositions that relate to the natural world.

It is noteworthy that the existence of untrue statements in myths is not such that their untruths are obvious to human beings from the very beginning. Rather, man has in the past considered all the components of myth to be real, but over time and with the acquisition of some new information, he has concluded that some of its propositions cannot be true.

The reason for the existence of such a belief for human beings is that human beings have seen that those propositions refer to beings and events that contemporary human beings do not find, and there is no way to discover them, and they do not even see the like. Therefore, it is concluded that they did not exist from the beginning and it was the human imagination in the past that created them.

Mythical descriptions in every nation are about truths that were out of their reach; like the events of the beginning of creation and the history of past tribes or the events of the end of the world or the sky or far regions in the earth.

Some people consider the range of untrue statements to be so wide that it even encompasses occult beings and events, so they have considered them as myths; but in the current paper, myth does not mean that. It seems that the difference between myth and unseen truths is that unseen truths are more or less occurring, and at all times, some people discover and deal with them. Like news from the secrets of hearts and from behind the scenes and the future and the past, and the seizure of people and objects, or the healing of terminally ill and blind children and through the earth and the transformation of objects. Myths, on the other hand, tell of events and beings that have only happened in the past and no longer even occur. Therefore, given that miracles can occur in any period, they are not myths.

There are some untrue statements in the descriptions of the Qur'an; it is as if angels live in the sky and meteors prevent demons from entering their cities. Or a people called Gog and Magog are imprisoned behind the dam built by Dhu al-Qarnayn against them until the Day of Judgment.

The justification for the existence of false propositions in the Qur'an is that these propositions exist in the culture of the Qur'anic audience and are used in the Qur'an as a form and means of expressing preaching intentions. The Qur'an was not their inventor. Even those have not been approved through Quran. Therefore, their presence in the Qur'an never disturbs the legitimacy of the Qur'an's mission.

### 3. Examples of myths in the Qur'an

Two examples of verses in which some Islamic thinkers, in their view, have exploited myth, are as follows:

#### 3-1. Avoid devils through meteors

According to some Islamic thinkers, one of the examples of using the myths and fantasies of the audience in the Qur'an is the answer to the accusation of the Quraysh polytheists who said that the Qur'an is instilled by the devil to the Prophet (PBUH) and not by angels. As stated:

“Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars, (6) and to guard from any froward devil (7) They do not eavesdrop on the Supernal Elite—they are shot at from every side, (8) to drive them away, and there is a perpetual punishment for them— (9) except any who snatches a snatch, whereat a piercing flame pursues him. (10)” (Quran: 37)

The ancient commentators considered the fall of meteors to drive away demons in the verse to be real. For example, Zamakhshari and Fakhr Razi are like this. Zamakhshari says in the following verses: The devils are not able to hear the words of the angels from heaven; because they are driven away by meteors, except the demons who secretly eavesdrop, in which case fiery and splitting meteors are thrown at them. He adds that "supreme" means angels; because they dwell in the heavens; In contrast to humans and jinn, which are "lower"; for they are the inhabitants of the earth (Zamakhsharī, 1407: 4/34-36).

Fakhr Razi also considers this story to be real and seeks to justify its issues. For example, he writes: If it is said that the stars of adornment are the heavens, they must survive and continue. However, throwing them at the devils

and throwing them at the devils will destroy them, and this will lead to a community of contradictions. He then replied that the stoning of demons does not mean that the stars are thrown at the demons; rather, flames from the stars can be thrown at the demons, and those flames are the same meteors, and the meteors are nothing but fragments taken from the fire (Fakhr Rāzī, 1420: 26/317-321).

But some contemporary commentators, such as Allameh Tabatabai, have not considered the fall of a meteor to drive away demons to be real. He writes about devils eavesdropping:

“The commentators have given various justifications to explain the eavesdropping of the devils and the casting of meteors, which can be based on the apparent interpretation of verses and hadiths. It means that there are constellations around the earth. In those constellations, groups of angels have taken up residence and are holding meteors, lurking in the ambush of demons who are eavesdropping and throwing meteors at them. Today, the invalidity of these views has become apparent.”

He then states the meaning he gives to those verses: those Qur'anic statements and examples given are intended to convey tangible truths with them in order to bring them closer to the mind. God Almighty said: “We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge. (29:43)”.

He adds: "In this way, the sky in which the angels dwell means a heavenly world with a superior horizon, and the ratio of that universe to this visible world is the ratio of the perceptible sky with its stars to the earth." What is meant by the devils

approaching the sky and eavesdropping on them and throwing meteors at them is that they approach the world of angels to know the secrets of creation and future events; but the light of the kingdom, which they cannot bear, is cast upon them (Tabātabā'ī, 1417: 17/125).

Here, Allameh Tabatabai explicitly rejects the meaning that angels are above the sky and meteors are thrown to prevent demons from entering this sky; however, he has diverted the mentioned verses from their true meaning and carried them to a figurative meaning to defend the legitimacy of the verses of the Qur'an. But according to some Islamic thinkers, the Qur'an speaks of the same meteors that human beings see in the sky of the world; Not truths that are beyond human comprehension and that man has not seen in the real world. However, neither the heavens of the world are the abode of angels nor angels are material beings who have a special place. Nor are meteors to drive away demons from the abode of angels. This is a misconception that the Arabs also had during the period of the revelation of the Qur'an. God has controversially used these false notions to refute their claim to say that your claim that the Qur'an is instilled by the devils in the Prophet (PBUH) is false.

According to these thinkers, God; here, to express an unseen truth incomprehensible to human beings, he has used his false imaginations to approximate his intention to the mind; just like the case of the Zaqoom tree. Undoubtedly, the angel is an unseen and immaterial being. The relationship between jinn and angels is also an unseen truth. Therefore, it has not been possible to express the relationship between jinn and angels, except by using the false Arab notions of the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. Even today, we cannot understand how the

Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet by an angel and not by jinn. If God wanted to tell us this truth, it would not be possible except by using our imaginary imaginations. Therefore, it is okay to use the audience's imaginary and false ideas as a tool to induce the purpose.

### **3-2. Imprisonment of Gog and Magog behind a dam until the Day of Judgment**

According to some Islamic thinkers, another example of the Qur'an's use of myths is related to the story of Dhu al-Qarnayn: Dhu al-Qarnayn built a barrier against a looting people, called Gog and Magog so that they would not attack other people, and they will be imprisoned behind that bar until the Day of Judgment. It is mentioned in Surah Al-Kahf:

“When he reached [the place] between the two barriers, he found between them a people who could hardly understand a word [of his language]. (93) They said, ‘O Dhu al-Qarnayn! Indeed, Gog and Magog are causing disaster in this land. Shall we pay you a tribute on condition that you build a barrier between them and us?’ (94) He said, ‘What my Lord has furnished me is better. Yet help me with some strength, and I will make a bulwark between you and them. (95) Bring me pieces of iron!’ When he had levelled up between the flanks, he said, ‘Blow!’ When he had turned it into fire, he said, ‘Bring me molten copper to pour over it.’ (96) So they could neither scale it, nor could they make a hole in it. (97) He said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord is fulfilled, He will level it; and my Lord’s promise is true.’ (98) That day We shall let them surge over one another, the Trumpet will be blown, and We shall gather them all, (99) and on

that day We shall bring hell into view visibly for the faithless. (100)”

The forerunners of the commentators, such as Zamakhshari and Fakhr Razi, considered the Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam and its breaking on the eve of the Day of Judgment to be real (Zamakhsharī, 1407: 2/746).

The commentators have considered this story real until the contemporary period so that they have clearly stated the geographical location of this dam and the identity of the people of Gog and Magog. However, some contemporary commentators, such as Allameh Tabatabai, have considered the Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam and its breaking on the eve of the Day of Judgment to be unrealistic and metaphorical (Fakhr Rāzī, 1420: 21/498).

Allameh Tabatabai has said that today cities are interconnected by land, sea, and air, and no natural barrier such as a mountain or sea or an artificial barrier such as a dam, wall, and the moat has separated any ethnic group from another. So, what does it mean for an ethnic group to be separated from the world by a dam between two mountains? He says: In my opinion, the answer is that - of course, God is more knowledgeable: "Daka" means humiliation, and the meaning of opening the dam is to humiliate it so that it is ignored and has no benefit. Because, communication routes have expanded and vehicles, including road, sea, and air, have become more diverse. Therefore, the truth of this promise is the promise of the progress of human society in terms of civilization and the rapprochement of nations, so that no barrier prevents them and no wall prevents them from moving to any part of the earth and from attacking and attacking Do not prevent any ethnic group they want. That meaning is

confirmed by another verse, which states the invasion of Gog and Magog: “until when Gog and Magog are let loose, and they race down from every slope, (22:96)” Because, it spoke about the conquest of Gog and Magog and did not say a word about the barrier (Tabātabāī, 1417: 13/398-399). Allameh, referring to the other meaning of “daka”, i.e. burial with soil, says: "The dam may be one of the buildings in the past that was buried in the soil due to a storm or was submerged by the movement or expansion of the seas", which Of course, he knows the first aspect better. Allameh Tabatabai, while stating this meaning for "daka", has been used in all verses of the Qur'an to mean the crumbling of a mountain and the like, and has never been used to mean humiliation or burial. In the context of the verse itself, no analogy confirms its proposed meanings. Moreover, no commentator before him had uttered such meanings, and all had taken the “daka” to mean the crumbling of the dam.

#### 4. Commentators' approach to Quranic myths

Islamic commentators and scholars have taken three different approaches to the examples of these verses throughout history. From the beginning of Islam till the fourteenth century, all commentators have carried such verses in the true sense. But since the fourteenth century, some, such as Allameh Tabatabai, have considered verses to be permissible and allegorical by taking the verses out of the real and conventional meanings in a different and unintelligible meaning. Some modernists, such as Khalafullah, have considered the expression of such verses as mythical.

The commentators, in the past, when likening the tree of Zaqqum to the heads

of the devils, easily accepted that God had used the false and imaginary images of the masses in expressing his purpose. However, regarding the stories of the captivity of the people of Gog and Magog, behind the dam of Dhu al-Qarnayn and the expulsion of demons with meteors and the like until the fourteenth century, they believed that the relevant verses were true stories and therefore considered them based on their true meanings. Until in the present century, due to the growth of science and technology, they realized that those stories could not have a real aspect; therefore, two allegorical and mythological approaches have been adopted towards them.

#### 4-1. Realism

Most commentators, up to the fourteenth century and even the contemporary, have considered almost all Qur'anic descriptions to be true. Of course, rare cases of them have also been considered as allegories; But they do not consider any description of the Qur'anic descriptions as myths. The reasons are as follows:

First, the expression of a myth conflicts with the wisdom of God. Saeedi Roshan says: "If we accept the wisdom of the resurrection of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, inviting people to the path of truth and correcting distorted truths and false beliefs, then we cannot give place to the false ideas of polytheists or the People of the Book in the text of God's word a united man about God believes that he has infinite knowledge and power; then why is it necessary for God to use false means to achieve his goal, which is to guide human beings? Not only is there no such necessity, but It is unwise to do so"(Roshan, 2004: 288).

Secondly, the myth of knowing the Qur'anic descriptions is inconsistent with the explanations of its verses. In this regard, several groups of verses are witnessed. First, the verses that introduce it as guidance; Like "This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary, (2:2)", "and it is not a jest." And other verses which introduce God consciously to the unseen and add that God reveals His knowledge of the unseen to His prophets; like: "Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] Unseen to anyone, (72:26)" or: "These are accounts of the Unseen, which We reveal to you. Neither you nor your people used to know them before this"(ibid).

Sayyid Qutb, probably commenting on the views of the likes of Ahmad Khalafullah, says that the Qur'an is a literary book; But being literary never means being imaginary, unreal, and irrational. Homer (the most infamous Greek epic poet of the seventh century BC) wrote his works, such as the Iliad and the Odyssey, from mythological narratives. The Qur'an, while being a literary book, is also historical; That is, it reports real events as they are. Even if we consider the Qur'an as a historical book and devoid of holiness, it is scientifically the strongest historical document. The rapporteur of the Qur'an is Muhammad ibn Abdullah, who, both in the past and in the present, has been acknowledged to be an honest person. The Qur'an was compiled scientifically, while no other holy and historical book has been prepared and quoted like the Qur'an. Therefore, the Qur'an should not be criticized like historical books, because they are not as strong as the Qur'an, and man cannot claim to know everything(Sayed Qutb, 1415: 257-258).



#### 4-2. Allegorism

Some contemporary commentators, such as Allameh Tabatabai, have considered such cases metaphoric and allegorical: Regarding the interpretation of the dismemberment of the Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam on the eve of the Day of Judgment, he says that "daka" in the verse of the Qur'an means humiliation, and the purpose of "daka" the dam is to humiliate it in a way that it falls out of use and is not used. As the means of communication expand, the means of transportation become more diverse, and the land, sea, and air routes are exploited. Therefore, the truth of this promise is the promise of the progress of human society in terms of civilization and the rapprochement of dispersed nations, insofar as no barrier prevents communication between them and no wall prevents their transfer (Tabātabā'ī, 1417: 13/398).

But such an interpretation has several problems, for example:

First, as has been said, such an interpretation of the breaking of the Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam is contrary to the interpretation given over the past fourteen centuries of the above verses. The claim that all the people of the past centuries have not been able to understand these verses correctly and have gone astray has false implications that cannot be imposed on them.

It can never be said that all Muslims from the beginning of Islam to the present century have misunderstood that they carried the story of Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam to the truth, and their inference was from the verses that there is a real dam behind which a real ethnic group is trapped.

Moreover, such a theory conflicts with the eloquence and rhetoric of the Qur'an and the revelation of the Qur'an in Arabic, and its ease of understanding

and guidance. Secondly, in the context of the verses of Surah Al-Kahf, there is no analogy by which breaking the barrier can be considered permissible and stating that this means scientific and technological growth. However, the verses of the Qur'an cannot be considered as a metaphor without comparison.

Also, like the interpretation of "Ja'allah Daka", which is mentioned in Surah Al-Kahf about the Dhu al-Qarnayn Dam, in another place, it is mentioned about the mountain: "But look at the mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.' So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He levelled it (7:143)". There is no doubt that "daka" here literally means the crumbling of a mountain.

Also, in other places in the Qur'an, regarding the condition of the mountains, the same word "daka" has been used to mean fragmentation, for example: "and the earth and the mountains are lifted and levelled with a single levelling, (69:14)". According to the above example, the above verse is another analogy that the meaning of "deck" in Surah Al-Kahf is the same as the true meaning of breaking the dam; not the virtual meaning that Allameh Tabatabai has said.

In the use of metaphor, it must be symmetrical with the word from the time of issuance of the word; Not that centuries pass and all commentators carry the verses of the Qur'an on the truth and then in the present century when science and technology have advanced and the conflict between the verses and reality seems to be carried over to metaphor.

#### 4-3. Mythology

Another approach to unreal verses is to consider such verses as myths. The

exploitation of myth as a preacher is flawless, as has the practice of all rational people who used conventional and common oral stories among the audience, which have a mythical aspect, as a preacher.

Myth never means that people consider it false and at the same time use it for preaching. Rather, they accept it because it is narrated heart to heart, and it is common among them, and that is enough to use it as a sermon (Arkun, 2001: 164).

The theory that myths such as the Dhu al-Qarnayn and the Dam are myths has the advantage of proving both the legitimacy of the Qur'an's original intentions and the eloquence, rhetoric and guidance of the Qur'an. According to this theory, the main purposes of the Qur'an are reminders, sermons, spiritual and moral guidance, and invitations to correct and acceptable beliefs and traditions; Therefore, the Qur'an should not be considered a book of history, astronomy, biology, etc (ibid).

Stories, proverbs, and other promises of the audience are also tools and forms of divine sermons. God has used these tools and forms of expression, which have been common among the audience of the Qur'an, to express His intentions, and therefore, if there are contradictions in these stories or the like, they cannot be attributed to God; rather, it is attributed to human conventions. In other words, every defect is in the ability, not in the activity of the agent. God has poured the higher knowledge into the imperfect human vessel to raise him to the higher world.

### 5. Pillars of Mythology

Some of the most important assumptions on which the mythical approach of Qur'anic descriptions is based are as follows:

#### 5-1. The preaching of the Qur'an

In the mythological approach, it is believed that the Qur'an is a book of sermons, reminders, and ethics; Not a book on history and nature; Therefore, one who intends to study history and nature should not seek it in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an introduces itself as a book of sermons: "O mankind! There has certainly come to you an advice from your Lord, and a cure for what is in the breasts, and a guidance and mercy for the faithful. (10:57)".

In several verses, the Qur'an is recited as a sermon. Also, preaching can be seen throughout the verses of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, every subject that is spoken of, including blessings, signs of divine power, rules, stories, and resurrection, is accompanied by a sermon.

Here, however, the purpose of the sermon is moral advice. For example, beware of disobeying God or associating partners with God; Worship him; Obey his commands; Take care of the orphans and the poor; Do not gossip and spy on each other, etc.

Khalafullah says that there are myths in the Qur'an, but the myth itself does not mean that falsehood has found its way into the Qur'an; Rather, it is intended for those religious purposes that are right and not wrong. Therefore, believing in the existence of myth in the Qur'an requires a false path to the Qur'an (Khalafullah, 1999: 200).

He quotes the author of Al-Manar, following the story of Harut and Marut: "The stories in the Qur'an are for preaching and learning lessons, not to tell the history, nor to believe that the details of the news were like this in the past." These stories report true and false news and useful and harmful habits intending to preach and learn the ideas of right and wrong. Therefore, the report

of the Qur'an should not go beyond learning and guidance (Rashid Reza, 1990: 1/330; Khalafullah, 1999: 210).

He says that expressing a myth in the Qur'an is a common practice in Arabic literature and culture. Often in their speeches and writings, they mention the gods of good and evil, without believing in any of those pagan superstitions. In his opinion, these myths do not harm the legitimacy of the Qur'an; Because they are not intended and the Qur'an is not in a position to confirm them (ibid).

According to that theory, if we consider all the stories of the Qur'an as myths, we will never lose; Because the purpose of the stories is preaching and learning lessons, and it is the soul of preaching and learning that is valuable, not the form of expression. Whether the story is real, mythical, or allegorical, it is a form of expression. What does it matter to us whether Kiwmarth is Abu al-Bashar or Adam or anyone else? What matters is the moral teachings contained in the story.

According to that theory, by denying myth in the Qur'an, we only erase the face of the issue, but we can never solve it. That the angels live in heaven or that people are trapped behind a barrier until the Day of Judgment and like them will never be portable to reality. There can be no allegory and therefore we must consider them myths.

### 5-2. The allegory of myth

In the mythological approach, myth is a kind of allegory, because in both, the purpose is not the form of expression and the meaning is the meaning beyond the form of expression. In both, the facts are stated in the form of examples. However, in allegory, there is a tool that shows that the goal is not a form of expression, but in myth, there is no such tool. Myth is a metaphor that has a kind

of simile without the use of simile tools. For example, the two expressions "he is like a lion" and "he is a lion" are the same in meaning; But in the first phrase, there is a metaphorical tool; But it does not exist in the latter. The first type is an allegory and the second is a myth. Examples of both can be seen in verses 62-65 of Surah Safat: "Is this a better reception, or the Zaqqum tree? Indeed, we have made it a punishment for the wrongdoers. It is a tree that rises from the depths of hell. Its spathes are as if they were devils' heads."

In these verses, both the interpretation of "Shajra al-Zaqqum" is a simile and the interpretation of "those are the head of the devils". But in the first interpretation it is not a tool of simile; But in the latter. There is no doubt that the tree can never exist in hell, which is the place of fire, and the heads of the devils can never be seen with the naked eye; Therefore, the form of both propositions is imaginary and untrue, but in the Qur'an, they are used as a means to express the purpose.

In those verses, the shape of the tree of Zaqqum is likened to the heads of the devils, and no doubt the meaning is that the tree of Zaqqum has a terrible shape; Not to confirm that demons have terrible heads. The people of the age of revelation and no one else has seen the devils and their heads; But in their imagination, they had made a face and ahead for the demons, and without a doubt, this artificial face and the head was never real, but imaginary.

The commentators have rightly considered the simile of this verse to be imaginary (based on fantasy and not based on reality). As Zamakhshari writes: This simile is imaginary because people liken something to the face or head of the devil to express something that is ultimately disgusting and ugly. Just like when they liken something to

an angel in the best way. As it is stated in the Qur'an that when the women of the Egyptian court saw Joseph, they said: "This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!" (12:31)" (Zamakhsharī, 1407: 4/406). Fakhr Razi also says that this is an intangible simile, but imaginary. Just as a parable of angels in virtue is a good parable. The simile to the heads of the devils in ugliness and the similitude of creation is also good, and this is the way of the wise (Fakhr Rāzī, 1420: 26/337).

Allameh Tabatabai also considered this simile to be taken from the delusions and perceptions of the people in attributing the ugliest form to the devil. Like other commentators, he has referred to verse 31 of Yusuf in the good expression of this simile, like the simile to angels in good form and character (Tabātabā'ī, 1417: 17/140). Other commentators have considered the heads of demons to be something outside the realm of truth and related to imagination and metaphor (Fayd Kashānī, 1415: 4/270; Ibn Āshūr, nd: 23/41).

Therefore, according to Islamic commentators, there is nothing wrong with invoking the false and imaginary illusions of the masses of the masses, which have an imaginary and mythical aspect, to approach the mind and explain the ugliness of the tree of Zaqqum, which is an unseen truth; Undoubtedly, God is never here in a position to confirm the false and imaginary illusion of the masses, so that it can be said that it has found falsehood in the Qur'an.

### 5-3. Education and duty to the extent of reason

The mythical approach is based on the notion that God speaks to human beings as much as their intellect. The intellect

of human beings is also not perfect and free from error. God also obliges and punishes human beings according to their intellect (Kulaynī, 1984: 8/268).

Accordingly, the Messenger of God (PBUH) said: We prophets are commissioned to speak to people as much as their intellect. Imam Baqir said: God, in calculating the Day of Judgment, is as careful as the wisdom He has given to His servants in the world (Barqī, nd: 1/195).

Thus, when it is planned that knowledge is given to them as much as human intellects and tasks are prescribed as much as human intellects, there is no justification for the Qur'an to speak of knowledge beyond human intellects. The human intellect also undergoes a refined and complementary course over time. So, perhaps, in the past, humans considered something to be true; But with the passage of time and the equipping of the human intellect, they realize that they have made a mistake and that what they knew to be true is not true.

### 5-4. Addressing the Arabs of the Age of Revelation

The mythical approach is based on the assumption that the audience of the Qur'an was the Arab Hejaz of the time of the Prophet (PBUH). Therefore, the verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the polytheists of Mecca in the Meccan period and the people of Medina in the Medina period.

About 90 chapters of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an, have been revealed in Mecca and addressed to the polytheists of Quraysh, and about 24 chapters have been revealed in Medina and addressed to the people of Medina. These Surahs were revealed gradually over about 23 years. The reason for the gradual revelation of the Surahs of the Qur'an was that in addition to

consolidating the heart of the Prophet (PBUH), he was responsible for the issues that were raised among his people. As stated: "The faithless say, 'Why has not the Quran been sent down to him all at once?' So it was, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone. They do not bring you any representation but that We bring you the truth [in reply to them] and the best exposition. (25: 32, 33)". According to the above verses, the Quraysh asked why the Qur'an was not revealed to the Prophet all at once? The answer was: so that whenever they ask a question, a clear answer will be given. As mentioned elsewhere, one of their questions is: "Does not man see that We created him from a drop of [seminal] fluid, and, behold, he is an open contender!? He draws comparisons for Us, and forgets his own creation. He says, 'Who shall revive the bones when they have decayed?' Say, 'He will revive them who produced them the first time, and He has knowledge of all creation.'" In the above verses, the question is who revives these rotten bones? And the answer is: He will revive it, who first created it.

According to such an approach, the culture of the audience of the Qur'an has been oral. Therefore, it lacks the accuracy of historical recording and has a mythical aspect; Accordingly, when the Qur'an was revealed, it used the audience's common cultural expressions to express its guiding and preaching intentions.

### **5-5. Orality of the narration of the age of revelation**

The mythical approach is based on the idea that literate people among the Hejaz Arabs at the time of the Prophet (PBUH) were very few and far between.

Therefore, when they naturally wanted to pass on their promises and information to the next generations, they passed it on orally and breast to breast. Naturally, such a method of transfer is usually accompanied by ups and downs; Therefore, one should not expect the Arabs at that time to have heard and narrated their history and past in all its details. Accordingly, the existence of false statements in their history and past is inevitable and expected.

Regarding the prevalence of illiteracy in that era, it is enough to note that the person of the Prophet (PBUH) who was one of the nobles of Quraysh was illiterate. Therefore, it is stated about him in the Qur'an that: "You did not use to recite any scripture before it, nor did you write it with your right hand, for then the impugnors would have been skeptical. (29:48)". There was illiteracy in the Quraysh themselves; Therefore, it is stated in the Qur'an that God raised an illiterate person from among the illiterate ones to be a prophet: "It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. (62:2)".

### **5-6. The sensory and imaginative nature of Arabs knowledge**

The mythological approach is based on the idea that the Qur'anic audience's knowledge of the world is the sensory perceptions of the unarmed senses and the imaginations based on those perceptions. Therefore, they thought that the angels lived in the same sky above their heads. Accordingly, if the demons want to approach the abode of the angels to hear the news of the sky from them, the stars are thrown at them; As stated: "We have certainly adorned the

lowest heaven with lamps and made them [the means of pelting] missiles against the devils, and We have prepared for them a punishment of the Blaze. (67:5)"

It is clear that the shooting of stars is based on looking with the naked eye, otherwise, scientifically, the stars are very far from Earth and do not include meteors that hit the Earth's atmosphere. It is also obvious that angels are immaterial and therefore does not mean that their abode is above the sky. The residence of angels in the sky above the head is based on imagination based on the sense of appearance.

## 6. Answering the objections to the mythical approach

One of the most important objections to the mythical approach in Qur'anic descriptions is that the Qur'an calls itself true and denies being mythical:

### 6-1. The truth of the Qur'an

In violation of the mentioned theory, some have cited verses that call the Qur'an true and have argued that there can be no myth in the Qur'an, in the sense that it contains false statements (Aghaei, 2009: 13).

Proponents of this theory make such statements, regardless of whether or not the word truth is used in the Qur'an to mean a statement according to fact. By insisting that the statement in the Qur'an is not untrue, only the face of the issue is cleared; But the reality remains. For example, how can it be true that a nation is trapped behind a barrier until the Day of Judgment, and on the eve of the Day of Judgment when that barrier is broken, that people will leave behind that barrier? Or how can it be true that angels live in the same sky above and stars are thrown at them to drive demons out of the sky?

Therefore, we have to say that these statements were true to the audience of the Qur'an, i.e. the Arab Hejaz of the time of the Prophet (PBUH), but in fact this was not the case, and God has used the beliefs of the audience in the Qur'an to change the mind. This never means confirming those beliefs in order to deduce from them the confirmation of falsehoods and superstitions.

### 6-2. Denial of myth in the Quran

Opponents of that theory have argued that the claim of myth in the Qur'an was the same as the claim of the pagans of Mecca, which was rejected by the Qur'an, and therefore it cannot be accepted that there is a myth in the Qur'an. All commentators have taken the interpretation of "the first myths" used in 9 verses of the Qur'an to mean falsehoods, myths, and lies (Tabātabā'ī, 1417: 20/233; Fakhṛ Rāzī, 1420: 31/87; Tūsī, nd: 10/299; Tabrisī, 1993: 10/688).

Proponents of this theory say that the Hejaz polytheists, for example, called the afterlife "the ancient myth." For example, in Surah Al-Mu'minin (82-83) it is stated: "They said, 'What, when we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected? Certainly, we and our fathers were promised this before. [But] these are nothing but myths of the ancients.'"

The context of these verses shows that the polytheists referred to the "myths of the firsts" as the written promise of life after death in the ancient scriptures; As stated elsewhere: "The faithless say, 'This is nothing but a lie that he has fabricated, and other people have abetted him in it.' Thus they have certainly come out with wrongdoing and falsehood. They say, 'He has taken down myths of the ancients, and they are dictated to him morning and evening.' Say, 'It has been sent down by

Him who knows the hidden in the heavens and the earth. Indeed, He is all-forgiving, all-merciful.' (25: 4-6)"

During those verses, it is stated that the polytheists of Mecca had accused the Prophet (PBUH) of making the Qur'an with the help of a number of the People of the Book, and this Qur'an is the spelling of the People of the Book on that Imam. That is, the Qur'an was not revealed to him by God. Therefore, in this verse, the "firsts myths" of the Qur'an have never been denied, and even in many verses, it has been emphasized, as stated in Surah Al-Shu'ara (193-197): "brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit. upon your heart (so that you may be one of the warners), in a clear Arabic language. It is indeed [foretold] in the scriptures of the ancients. Is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel recognize it?"

These verses state that the content of the Qur'an is mentioned in the previous scriptures and that the scholars of the Children of Israel are aware of it.

It is not a secret that there is a difference between the statement that there is a myth in the Qur'an and the statement of the Arab polytheists of the time of the Prophet (PBUH) who said that the Qur'an is the first myth. Therefore, the new claim should not be considered as the claim of the Arab pagans. The differences between the two are:

First, the pagans referred to the "first myths" as the ancient scriptures. What is meant by myth in the new claim is never the old scriptures, but descriptions in which there are unrealistic propositions.

Secondly, the polytheists intended the myth of calling the Qur'an that the Qur'anic themes were not revealed to God by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). However, the purpose of the myth in the new claim is never so, but it is

emphasized that the Qur'an was revealed by God to the Prophet (PBUH).

Third, the pagans said that the "myths of the first," that is, the contents of the former scriptures, were invalid; But in the new claim, what is false is the very content of the myths. Also, it is stated that the themes of the myths themselves are not divine intentions, but that the intentions beyond those myths are divine intentions, and that they are also true and not false.

Therefore, what the Arab pagans considered false is true in the new claim, and therefore the new claim should not be equated with the claim of the Arab pagans.

### Conclusion

Based on the above, a few points can be obtained:

**First**, the Qur'an calls itself a book of sermons. Therefore, we, as readers of the Qur'an, need to be in a position to receive divine sermons from the verses of the Qur'an, not to discover historical or scientific events. Because in the Qur'an, the audience's promises have been used in expressing sermons. Therefore, the historical and natural verses of the Qur'an only reflect the Arab promises of the Hejaz of the time of the Prophet (PBUH), which may be untrue and false. However, the Qur'an is not in a position to confirm them so as not to undermine the legitimacy of the Qur'an.

**Second**, using the audience's stories and promises to instill purpose and preaching, even if mythical, is a rational practice. Therefore, the assumption that mythical themes are mentioned in verses.

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