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A Study of Qur'ānic Narrative Grammar: A Narratological Approach to the Accounts of the Creation Story in the Qur'ān

Abolfazl Horri^{1*} 

English Department, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Arak University, Arak-Iran

* Corresponding author: horri2004tr@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the narrative structure in the Qur'ānic surahs related to the story of creation. It begins with a brief introduction to the theoretical concepts of narrative grammar. The study then examines how this narrative grammar functions within the selected surahs at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the main events of each surah are outlined, identifying their fixed and variable elements. Additionally, the composition of these narratives is analyzed in terms of temporal, spatial, and causal principles. At the macro level, the study highlights the connection between these surahs, the prophetic biography, and the core teachings of Islam, including monotheism (Tawhid), prophethood (Nubuwwah), resurrection (Ma'ad), and divine justice ('Adl). These stories align seamlessly with the overarching themes and objectives of their respective surahs. Through Adam's creation, God affirms His oneness (Tawhid) and appoints prophets to guide Adam's descendants. In contrast, Iblis and his followers oppose the prophets and the righteous. However, divine justice ultimately ensures that victory belongs to the righteous, and Adam and his progeny return to God (resurrection). Thus, the core theme of Adam's story revolves around three key axes: the call to worship, arrogance and rejection, and the salvation of believers alongside the downfall of disbelievers—an axis that extends to other Qur'ānic narratives as well. The findings of this study deepen our understanding of the Qur'ān's narrative structures and their connection to divine teachings. Furthermore, they provide a foundation for further research in narratology, semantics, and the intertextual analysis of religious texts.

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1. Introduction

Storytelling has been an integral part of human culture since ancient times. As Barthes (1966/1977) aptly observed, storytelling is universal—there have never been, nor will there ever be, people unfamiliar with stories. From myths and epics to sacred texts, narratives have long served as vehicles for conveying values, beliefs, and traditions. Among these, divine scriptures such as the Torah and the Qur'ān hold a distinctive place. While the Bible—particularly the Old Testament—is deeply rooted in a storytelling tradition (Alter & Kermode, 1978; Bar-Efrat, 1997), the Qur'ān's use of narratives goes beyond artistic expression or entertainment. Instead, Qur'ānic stories function as a profound medium for moral and spiritual guidance (Horri, 2009).

Although the Qur'ān recounts real events involving prophets and past communities—some of which may be categorized as retributive tales (Horri, 2024)—storytelling did not occupy the same central role in early Islamic culture as the study of rhetoric and eloquence. However, it is noteworthy that approximately one-quarter of the Qur'ān is dedicated to stories (Al-Jaberi, 2020). In recent times, scholarly focus on Qur'ānic narratives has expanded beyond rhetoric and style to include the study of narrative stylistics (Horri, 2009). This approach involves analyzing Qur'ānic stories through the lens of narratology and narrative grammar, which is the central concern of this paper (Horri, 2009). This paper aims to address the key question:

- ✓ How can narrative theory and grammar be applied to the analysis of Qur'ānic stories?

By utilizing narratological concepts and examining various accounts of the Creation story—particularly in Surah Sa'd—this study seeks to propose a theoretical and practical framework for defining, analyzing, and interpreting Qur'ānic narratives. This approach not only illuminates the Qur'ān's storytelling techniques but also deepens our understanding of its pedagogical and spiritual functions.

2. Literature Review

This section is divided into two sub-sections: the theoretical framework and a review of the most relevant literature.

2.1. Narrative Grammar as a Linguistic Framework in Qur'anic Stories

Narrative grammar in Qur'ānic stories operates similarly to the subject, verb, and object in natural languages. In linguistic theory, the subject performs the action, and the verb links the subject to the object. In narrative theory, however, the "subject" of the story is represented by the character, who drives the events forward. Just as a syntactic structure in a sentence is formed by the subject and the verb, a narrative structure is constructed through characters (the agents) and events (the actions).

Scholars in narrative grammar focus on various aspects of the story. Propp (1928/1968), for example, emphasizes 'events' and 'roles', which he refers to as 'functions' and 'spheres of action', respectively. Bremond (1977) highlights the sequence of events, while Greimas (1971) integrates both events and characters, calling them 'actions' and 'actants'. Todorov

(2000), in addition to addressing events and characters, also considers other crucial elements like time and perspective, which are essential for analyzing narrative structure. Similarly, Barthes (1966/1977) views events, characters, and narrative action not only as components at the sentence level but as fundamental elements of the entire narrative discourse.

2.1.1. Narrative Surface Structure

Analyzing the narrative surface structure involves three stages: recounting the events, categorizing them, and determining their relationships. The first stage, recounting events, simplifies them into narrative propositions that identify the agent (subject) and the action (verb). For example, in Surah 12 (Joseph's dream), Joseph is the agent, and "dreaming" is the action. The second stage involves categorizing events into actions and happenings. Actions are those where the character is the agent, while happenings involve the character as the patient. Furthermore, actions can be classified as either external or internal events. These components interact through five key principles: time, causality, space, character, and internal relationships. The interaction of these principles forms micro-sequences, which combine to create macro-sequences, ultimately forming the complete narrative.

2.1.2. Narrative Deep Structure

While the surface structure examines the arrangement of events at the micro-sequence level, the deep structure delves into the underlying semantic relationships that govern these sequences. The deep structure serves as the abstract framework of the narrative, shaping its meaning. As Prince (2003) explains, the deep structure consists of universal syntactic-semantic representations, which are transformed into the surface structure through a set of rules. Russian Formalists differentiate between the surface structure (*syuzhet*) and the deep structure (*fabula*), with the former representing the narrative discourse and the latter referring to the story itself. In this analysis, the deep structure will focus on the semantic relationships between events in the Qur'anic Creation story. These relationships offer valuable insights into the overarching themes of the narrative, including the fall of Adam, the rebellion of Iblis, and the eventual restoration of order.

2.2. *The Review of the Related Literature*

Recently, there has been a growing trend among scholars to apply critical and narratological approaches to Qur'anic stories. Horri has made significant contributions to this emerging field by examining various narratological aspects of Qur'anic narratives. In one of his Persian papers, Horri (2010) explored the narrative time and place in Qur'anic stories. In another study, Horri (2009) discussed Qur'anic terminologies related to the concept of story, including terms such as 'qasas', 'hadith', and 'naba'. Furthermore, Horri (2023b) analyzed the role of character and characterization in Qur'anic narratives. In his more recent work, Horri (2024) investigated the narrative structure in a selection of punishment-oriented stories from the Qur'an. His goal was to analyze both the surface and deep structures of these narratives to determine whether a comprehensive and overarching structure could be identified for their analysis. Additionally, Horri (2023a) examined the typology of speech and thought representation in selected Qur'anic stories, providing both a theoretical and practical framework for analyzing these aspects within the Qur'anic discourse. Horri (2023b) also demonstrated how Persian and English translators have rendered the simile marker 'k'ann', one of the most common words of resemblance, across 25 verses of the Qur'an. Building on Horri's (2024) work, this paper aims to apply a

narratological approach to various versions of the Creation story, with a particular focus on Surah Sa'd.

2. Methodology

The practical framework and methodology of this paper are grounded in the widely accepted distinction in narratology between two levels of narrative: **story** and **text**. This distinction provides a structured approach for analyzing the Qur'ānic Creation story as the case study. Specifically, this paper focuses on the *fabula* (the chronological sequence of events) in the Qur'ānic Creation story, examining its deep structure by analyzing the events, their arrangement, and the relationships between them. These elements are explored in accordance with the narrative syntax present in the relevant surahs.

The theoretical framework is rooted in **structural narratology**, drawing on the works of prominent narrative grammarians such as Propp (1928/1968), Bremond (1977), Greimas (1971), and Todorov (2000). These scholars provide foundational models for analyzing narratives at the story level, emphasizing the structural principles underlying the organization of events and characters. This framework informs the **methodology**, which is both conceptual and non-empirical:

- **Conceptual:** The study aims to reinterpret and adapt key concepts from the theoretical framework (structural narratology) to analyze the Creation story in the Qur'ān. It seeks to refine and apply narrative theory to Qur'ānic storytelling, particularly at the story level.

- **Non-empirical:** Instead of relying on external data or experimental methods, the analysis is grounded in textual evidence. Qur'ānic stories, specifically the Creation story, are examined through the lens of narrative grammar, focusing on their inherent structural elements.

This combination of theoretical and methodological approaches ensures a systematic and rigorous analysis of Qur'ānic narratives, contributing to both the fields of narratology and Qur'ānic studies

3. Analysis

3.1. Narrative Grammar in the Creation Stories of the Qur'ān

The story of Adam's creation and his descent to Earth is found across multiple Meccan and Medinan surahs in the Qur'ān. Unlike the Book of Genesis, which presents a chronological and continuous narrative, the Qur'ān offers a series of brief, concentrated accounts of the story. Each surah highlights specific events from Adam's life, often repeating them with distinct narrative styles in different surahs. In other words, unlike the direct and linear account in Genesis, the Qur'ān does not present the story of Adam in a straightforward manner. Instead, readers must gather various scattered episodes from Adam's life, akin to pearls, and thread them together to form a cohesive historical or chronological sequence.

Thus, unlike in Genesis, where the reader remains "detached from" the story, the Qur'ān invites the reader to actively participate "alongside" the narrative. The completion of the

story in the Qur'ān depends on the reader's dynamic engagement with the text. From a narratological perspective, the reader in the Qur'ān does not engage with the story as a straightforward plot; instead, they interact with the text itself. The reader must navigate through different surahs to piece together the main story, or fabula, of Adam. Qur'ānic narratives present fragmented segments of stories rather than a continuous chronological sequence of events.

In the Qur'ān, the focus lies more on the *text*, the act of narration, *al-khitab* (the discourse), and the storytelling style rather than on the story itself. Repetition of certain events serves not only rhetorical functions, categorized under "variation in expression," but also helps the reader recall key dispersed events from different surahs. Most importantly, each surah introduces one or two new narrative functions, adding incremental information and advancing the story. The presence or absence of these functions renders the narrative style of the story in one surah different from its presentation in another. In the following, first, we attempt to examine the narrative surface structure of the creation story based on the Makkan or Medinan nature of the surahs, following the chronological order in which they were revealed to the Prophet over 23 years. This approach allows us to immerse ourselves in the story and experience it in the same way the initial audience heard it.

3.2. Analyzing the Surface Structure of the Creation Story Based on Meccan and Medinan Surahs

The creation story—specifically, the story of Adam and his descent to Earth—holds a prominent place within the collection of Meccan narratives, categorized by Al-Jabiri (2020) as a foundational or archetypal story. Though not inherently a story of retribution, it sets the stage for other Qur'ānic narratives and may be seen as God's introductory narrative in His role as the ultimate narrator, with subsequent stories drawing inspiration from it. The journey away from and the longing to return to the original state of being begins with this very story.

The creation story can also be organized according to the chronological revelation of the Meccan and Medinan surahs as follows: Surah Sa'd, Al-A'raf, Ta-Ha, Al-Isra, Al-Hijr, Al-Kahf, and Al-Baqarah. While the overarching theme of human creation remains consistent across these surahs, narrative style and phrasing vary. Analyzing the surface structure of Adam's creation story within these surahs reveals three common events: God's command to the angels to prostrate before Adam, the angels' obedience to this command, and Iblis's defiance.

Adam's story appears in seven surahs: six Meccan surahs (Sa'd [38:71-85], Al-A'raf [7:11-25], Ta-Ha [20:115-124], Al-Isra [17:61-65], Al-Hijr [15:26-44], and Al-Kahf [18:50]) and one Medinan surah (Al-Baqarah [2:30-38]). Surah Sa'd is the first to mention Adam's story, and Surah Al-Kahf is the last Meccan surah to reference it. Surah Al-Baqarah, the first surah revealed after the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina, also recounts the story. We see the same theme narrated differently across these surahs.

In the following analysis, we will focus on the Qur'ānic account of Adam's story in Surah Sa'd [38:71-85], examining how the single theme of human creation and Iblis's rebellion is expressed through two distinct narrative approaches in terms of language and presentation of information.

3.3. the Story of Creation in Surah Sa'd

Surah Sa'd, the 38th chapter of the Qur'ān in the order of revelation, was revealed after Surah Qamar and before Surah Araf. This chapter is considered one of the "Mathani" chapters, as its main stories and messages are reiterated in other chapters. However, this repetition does not imply mere redundancy but rather a "variation in expression," conveying a single concept in diverse linguistic styles. According to tradition, this chapter was revealed when the Quraysh approached Abu Talib to dissuade the Prophet from calling people to Islam, using various promises and temptations. In response, the Prophet firmly declared that even if they placed the sun in his right hand and the moon in his left, he would not abandon his mission.

3.3.1. Structure and Themes of Surah Sa'd

Al-Jaberi (2021) characterizes this chapter as containing short verses with a rhythmic structure, and in terms of themes, it emphasizes monotheism, the rejection of idolatry, prophecy, the afterlife, and social issues. He believes that these concepts are reinforced through the repeated mention of stories of the prophets. This chapter can be divided into four main sections:

1. Verses on the Prophet's mission and biography (verses 1-11): This section begins with the disjointed letter 'Sa'd' and highlights the Qur'ān as a source of remembrance and warning for disbelievers.
2. Verses on Qur'ānic stories (verses 12-70): This section includes stories of various prophets, such as David (verses 17-26), Solomon (verses 30-40), Job (verses 41-44), and references to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
3. Verses on the people of paradise and hell (verses 49-64): This part describes the blessings of paradise and the torments of hellfire.
4. Verses on the story of creation (verses 71-85): This segment, which narrates the creation of Adam and Iblis's defiance, emphasizes the role of revelation and the Prophet's position.

3.3.2. the Story of Creation and Its Link to Revelation

The story of Adam's creation in verses 71-85 is the climax of this surah. In this story, God commands the angels to bow to Adam; the angels obey, but Iblis defies this command out of arrogance. Consequently, God expels him from His presence. Here, the Qur'ān stresses that the Prophet was not physically present among the angels to witness this story; instead, this knowledge was revealed to him through divine inspiration. This point aims to reassure the disbelievers that what the Prophet conveys is directly from God, and they will soon learn the truth of this message.

In sum, the story of creation in Surah Sa'd, beyond serving as an instructive narrative, illustrates the profound link between divine revelation and the Prophet. Through elements such as God's command to the angels, Iblis's rebellion, and the emphasis on the Prophet's role in conveying divine messages, the narrative invites the audience to a deeper understanding of prophecy and the authenticity of revelation in the face of the Quraysh's skepticism.

Now, after providing a general overview of the structure and content of Surah Sa'd, we will focus on the grammar of the creation story as presented in this Surah. Following a description of the surface structure and deep structure of the story, we will also examine the intertextual relationships between this narrative and other stories mentioned in the Surah, as well as its connections to the Prophetic biography. Notably, Surah Sa'd (verses 71–85) is the first chapter among the early Meccan narratives to recount the creation story:

When thy Lord said to the angels, 'See, I am creating a mortal of clay, (71) when I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him!' (72) Then the angels bowed themselves all together, (73) save Iblis; he waxed proud, and was one of the unbelievers. (74) Said He, 'What prevented thee to bow thyself, when I commanded thee? Art thou waxed proud, or art thou of the lofty ones?' (75) Said he, 'I am better than he; Thou createdst me of fire, and him Thou createdst of clay.' (76) Said He, 'Then go thou forth hence; thou art accursed. (77) Upon thee shall rest My curse, till the Day of Doom.' (78) Said he, 'My Lord, respite me till the day they shall be raised.' (79) Said He, 'Thou art among the ones that are respited (80) until the day of the known time.' (81) Said he, 'Then by Thy might I will pervert them, every one, (82) excepting Thy servants among them that are sincere.' (83) Said He, 'The truth is, and the truth I say: (84) I shall assuredly fill Gehenna with thee, and with whosoever of them follows thee, all together.' (85) **(Arberry's translation).**

3.3.3. the Narrative Grammar of Creation in Surah Sa'd

According to the principles of narrative grammar that we discussed, every narrative text consists of a surface structure and a deep narrative structure. Each surface narrative structure has two main components: events and entities. An event represents either a physical or mental activity performed by entities (characters) as agents in a temporal and spatial axis—whether it's a physical action, a mental perception, or an emotional response. Simply put, the surface narrative structure comprises an event (action or occurrence) + entities (characters in the roles of agent/subject and object/recipient) + setting (time and place). For example, in Surah Sa'd, verse 71:

“When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a human being from clay’” (71).

The surface narrative structure here consists of two events: ‘said’ (mental) and ‘create’ (physical); the agent (God); the object (the angels); the time (‘when’); and the setting (‘the Divine Court’). In essence, each surface structure represents a narrative sentence composed of a subject and object along with an action; or in other terms, an agent, a recipient, and an act. The subject and object can be human, non-human, or even supernatural, such as God and the angels. Here, God acts as the agent or initiator of action, while the angels serve as the recipients, fulfilling the role of characters, though God can also be seen as the narrative voice.

These two characters can engage in various types of actions: non-verbal physical actions, speech acts, cognitive actions, sensory perceptions, and emotional reactions. However, listing each individual event would be time-consuming and overly detailed, so we will consider each verse as the unit of analysis, rather than focusing solely on each isolated event. This approach allows us to streamline the list of events within each surface narrative structure in the creation story of each surah, limiting the analysis to the main events without committing to exhaustive details of each occurrence.

Now, we can summarize the main events of the surface narrative structure of the creation story in Surah Sa'd in the following propositions:

1. God informs the angels of the creation of Adam from clay (Sa'd 71).
2. God commands the angels to prostrate to the human after the soul is breathed into him (Sa'd 72).
3. The angels prostrate (Sa'd 73).
4. Satan refuses (Sa'd 74).
5. God asks Satan the reason for his refusal (Sa'd 75).
6. Satan argues that he was created from fire and the human from clay (Sa'd 76).
7. Satan is expelled from the Divine presence and is cursed forever (Sa'd 77).
8. Satan asks God for respite until the Day of Judgment (Sa'd 79).
9. God grants his request (Sa'd 80).
10. Satan swears to deceive all humans except for the pure-hearted servants of God (Sa'd 83).
11. God warns Satan and his followers (Sa'd 85).

Interestingly, some of these events, which are all considered "nuclei" (from Chatman's (1987) perspective), correspond to some of Propp's proposed functions. For example, God's informing the angels about the creation of Adam corresponds to the "informing" function, marked as 'St.' Satan's refusal corresponds to the 'maleficence' function, marked as 'A'. God's questioning of Satan for his refusal corresponds to the "inquiry" function, marked as 'E'. Satan's reasoning corresponds to the 'baseless claims' function, marked as 'L'. Satan's deception of humans corresponds to the 'deception/treachery' function, marked as 'Et'. Finally, the expulsion and cursing of Satan and the punishment of Satan and his followers in Hell correspond to the 'punishment' function, marked as 'U'. These functions have a general but imprecise alignment.

Now, we can combine these events based on their themes, subjects, or adjacency, and present them as a micro-sequence, which can then be named through re-narration, as propositions or statements. From Todorov's perspective, the actions in these events either change a state (God creates the human), rebuke something (God rebukes Satan), or have a punitive or retributive aspect (God punishes Satan and his followers). At the same time, each of these events or narrative propositions (in Todorov's terms) has three aspects: either they declare something with certainty (God informs about the creation of Adam—indicative mood); or express a desire or wish (the angels' prostration to Adam—desiderative mood); or are definitively carried out (God punishes Satan—imperative mood).

From Todorov's perspective, we can combine these events or narrative propositions based on temporal (based on the principle of 'what happens next'), logical (based on the principle of 'therefore, because, and so on'), and spatial relationships (based on 'symmetry, deviation, repetition, equivalence, etc.') to form a micro-sequence or a micro-sequence/ progression:

1. **Micro-sequence of God's command (71-72):** Based on the temporal and logical relationship, as God is the cause of all phenomena.
2. **Micro-sequence of accepting the command/refusal from pride (73-74; 76):** Spatial relationship.
3. **Micro-sequence of God's rebuke and punishment (75 and 77):** Logical relationship.
4. **Micro-sequence of Satan requesting respite/ confrontation (79 and 82-83):** Logical/spatial relationship.
5. **Micro-sequence of God's warning and the fate of Satan and his followers (85):** Temporal and logical relationship.

Interestingly, Micro-sequence 2 aligns with the function pair "command and violation of the command," while Micro-sequence 5 aligns with the function pair "battle and victory" in Propp's model. Furthermore, from Todorov's (2000) perspective, these micro-sequences or progressions combine in three ways: **encompassing** (placing one progression inside another), **chain** (either in consecutive chronological order or balanced in parallel), and **alternating** (mentioning two or more progressions alternately, either regularly or irregularly). Bremond also identifies three types of sequence combinations: **chain**, **encompassing**, and **linking**. According to Bremond (1973), micro-sequences are either **progressive sequences** (moving from imbalance to balance) or **disorder** (moving from balance to imbalance).

In this narrative structure of the creation story, which is of the type of pre-existing/post-event narrative, the story begins with the proposition of God's informing the angels about the creation of Adam from clay. The events are chained together based on a chronological time sequence. Satan's act of disobedience takes the narrative back to the creation phase (temporal regression/backward flashback). The narrative returns to the chronological path, and the events chain again. Then, with Satan's request for respite, the narrative moves forward (temporal progression/flash forward). The story concludes with these previous events.

Additionally, from Levi-Strauss's perspective, these micro-sequences foster the opposing mythical pairs of "good and evil," which are not only part of this segment of the creation story but also pervade the overall structure of Qur'ānic stories and, more importantly, the Qur'ānic discourse. Here, the main opposition is between God and the angels (Satan is initially one of the angels)

This story, on one hand, establishes inter-surah and inter-narrative relationships with other stories of the prophets within the same surah, other surahs that address creation narratives, and even with the Prophet's biography (*Sīra*). As previously mentioned, Surah Sa'd is one of the 'Mathāni' surahs, which contains several Qur'ānic stories. The phrase 'Sa'd and the Qur'ān, the bearer of reminder' in the first verse treats the Qur'ān as a reminder, referring to these Qur'ānic stories that it recounts. Contrary to most exegeses, Saad Abdul-Muttalib 'Adl (2009) believes that 'Sa'd' refers to the disbelievers who slandered the Prophet, falsely accused him of sorcery, lies, and the fabrication of the Qur'ān, while also rejecting the concept of divine oneness. However, God reassures the Prophet that all of these accusations and efforts will ultimately fail.

To comfort and soothe the Prophet's heart, God recounts the stories of past nations who, like the Quraysh, denied their Prophet and opposed him. Thus, through these stories, the Qur'ān encourages the Prophet to remain steadfast in his mission to call the Quraysh to monotheism, urging him to follow the example of the previous prophets and remain patient and persistent. Interestingly, before the creation story is introduced, the surah asks the Prophet to only serve as a warner, stating that he is not privy to the knowledge of angels or their affairs, and that the truth rests solely with God. Following this, the description of heavenly blessings and the consequences of the afterlife thematically connects the earlier verses to the creation story.

In this section, part of the creation narrative is mentioned, including the creation of Adam from clay, the dialogue between God and humanity, Satan's refusal to bow to Adam, and God's granting of respite to Satan. The primary emphasis in these verses is not to provide a full account of the creation story, but rather to compare Satan's pride and arrogance in refusing to bow to Adam, despite God's command, with the pride and obstinacy of the Quraysh, who similarly reject God's command and refuse to accept the prophetic message of Muhammad

In terms of inter-narrative relationships, the stories of peoples like 'Ād, Thamūd, and Lot address the Quraysh, urging them to take heed of the fates of those who once inhabited the same land long before them, which has now temporarily passed into the Quraysh's possession. At the same time, the stories of prophets like David, Solomon, and Job are directed specifically toward the Prophet. David and Solomon possessed great wealth and power and were constantly at risk of being captivated by worldly glitters and allurements. Al-Jabiri (2021) points out David's love for women and Solomon's love for power and status. Similarly, the Quraysh attempted to tempt the Prophet by offering him wealth, prosperity, and vast influence, paralleling the situations of David and Solomon.

However, just as David, after judging a dispute between two adversaries—who were, in fact, angels—realizes that he is undergoing a divine test, he repents, prostrating and turning back to God. The Prophet, too, is urged to learn from David's experience. While David, upon realizing he had not acted rightly, immediately repented in prostration, Satan, despite knowing he was bound to obey God's command, refused to prostrate to Adam and did not repent. Interestingly, the story of Job also exemplifies the promise Satan makes in the creation narrative to mislead all humankind, except for God's chosen servants. Job, along with David and Solomon, counts among these devoted servants of God, immune to Satan's misguidance. In this way, Solomon's story connects to both the creation narrative and the Prophet's biography.

Thus, the story of Solomon, along with those of other prophets, conceptually and contextually intertwines with the creation story and the Prophet's biography, forming intertextual and inter-narrative linkages.

Meanwhile, if we consider each of these stories as having its own individual sequence, we find that they are interconnected in terms of causal and logical relationships, as Todorov would describe, forming an environmental and internal sequence embedded within the main framework of Surah Sa'd. This surah functions as an all-encompassing narrative that situates each of these stories within its larger purpose. As Al-Jabiri summarizes, 'The Prophet's steadfastness against the temptations of the Quraysh is akin to the resilience of David and Solomon {and of Job and other prophets}, while the pride of the Quraysh, astonished that

someone other than the elites of Mecca has been chosen for this mission, mirrors the arrogance of Iblis.’

Most importantly, the inclusion of the creation narrative within this surah serves as a reminder that the Prophet did not fabricate the Qur’ān, as the Quraysh assumed; rather, it is divine speech revealed by God, with the Prophet acting as a mere warner. Thus, the closing verses of the surah link conceptually, textually, narratively, and contextually to its opening verses, particularly with the Qur’ān described as a “reminder” or *dhikr*. Notably, Surah Sa’d is among the first Meccan surahs to reference the creation story within its narrative structure and themes, although other segments of the creation story appear in different Meccan surahs, each adapted to the specific context of its respective surah.

Moreover, all these segments of the creation narrative in both Meccan and Medinan surahs create intertextual, inter-sura, and inter-narrative connections. For instance, we will examine the creation story in Surah Sa’d alongside its counterpart in Surah Al-Hijr. Examining all these narrative structures ultimately provides a foundation for a deep structural analysis of the creation story, which we will address in the appropriate section.

In essence, this surah provides the first account of the creation of Adam (see the inter-sura analysis with Surah Al-Hijr below), with this account in the latter part of the surah setting the stage for its continuation in Surah Al-A‘raf. As Al-Jabiri notes, “Iblis’s arrogance in refusing to prostrate to Adam is similar to the pride of the Quraysh elite... In response, God commanded Iblis to descend from heaven to earth to find his true place among the lowly.”

This layered approach in Surah Sa’d draws not only from narrative interconnections but also from a literary and thematic technique that resonates through other Qur’ānic stories, much like the interwoven nature of narratological elements Abolfazl has been exploring in Qur’ānic storytelling. This method mirrors how these layered stories, embedded in multiple surahs, resonate with one another and with themes in the Prophet’s own experience.

3.3.4. Analyzing the Narrative Surface Structure of Creation Story Versions Based on the Historical Sequence of Surahs in the Holy Qur’ān

As we have discussed, the narrative surface structure (in this case, the creation of Adam) consists of events that are conveyed through retelling or narration, capturing the essence of the events. This recounting of events can be presented in the form of event-labels or titles, expressed as phrases or sentences. For example, in Surah Al-Baqarah (verses 30-33), we find a series of verses that narrate the creation of Adam and the angels’ objection to it.

This layered narrative recounting reflects the historical evolution of the storytelling style across the surahs, where the creation of Adam is repeatedly revisited with variations that build upon its foundational elements. Each surah’s portrayal of the story resonates with its unique context, theme, and purpose within the Qur’ān, contributing to a comprehensive, interconnected understanding of the narrative’s role and significance:

And when thy Lord said to the angels, ‘I am setting in the earth a viceroy’, they said, ‘What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there, and shed blood, while we proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?’ He said, ‘Assuredly I know that you know not’ (30). And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them unto the angels and said, ‘Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly’. (31) They said, ‘Glory be to

Thee! We know not save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise' (32). He said, 'Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names He said, 'Did I not say to you, "Surely I know the unseen things of the heavens and earth, and I know what things you reveal, and what you were hiding?"' (33)" (Arberry's Translation).

These three verses contain several primary and secondary events. If we consider an event to be a change in state or position along the timeline, or the display of a physical or mental activity that occurs as a physical phenomenon in time, carried out by an agent (human or non-human) or affecting an agent, or as a state of thought, feeling, or contemplation extended over time, we can list the physical or mental events in these three verses as follows:

1. The Lord, as a non-human agent, speaks to the angels, who are also non-human agents.
2. The agent promises a physical action.
3. The promise of appointing a vicegerent on Earth.
4. The angels respond.
5. The angels glorify God.
6. The angels sanctify God.
7. God comments (a mental action: 'I know what you do not know').

Here, God is the agent or actor, while the angels are the recipients of the action, and they play the roles of two main characters, although God can also be viewed as the narrative voice. These two characters can perform various types of actions: physical non-verbal actions, speech acts, mental reflections, emotional responses, perceptions, and sentiments. We can structure these events into a sequence or sub-sequence and express them in summarized form as a phrase or sentence. For example, these interactions between God and the angels can be encapsulated in an event-label as a phrase like "*The declaration of Adam's creation and the angels' objection*", or as a complete sentence: "*God announces the creation of Adam, and the angels object*" or "*The creation of Adam is announced, and the angels object.*"

These sub-sequences combine to form macro-sequences. Similarly, macro-sequences combine in various ways to create a cohesive narrative text. Based on this approach, we will first attempt to identify the micro-sequences of the creation story according to the order of surahs in the Qur'an, that is, as they appear in the surahs:

- a) Micro-sequence of the announcement of Adam's creation and the angels' objection: Baqarah (2:30–33).
- b) Micro-sequence of Adam's creation: Al-Imran (3:59); Nisa (4:1); A'raf (7:189); Isra (17:61); Zumar (39:6).
- c) Micro-sequence of the angels' prostration to Adam: Baqarah (2:35); A'raf (7:11); Isra (17:61); Kahf (18:50); Ta-Ha (20:116).

d) Micro-sequence of God's command to Iblis to prostrate to Adam, and his refusal: Saad (38:71–72); Hijr (15:28–29); A'raf (7:11); Isra (17:61); Ta-Ha (20:116); Baqarah (2:34); Kahf (18:50); Hijr (15:30–31); Saad (38:73–74).

e) Micro-sequence of God's question about Iblis's pride and his response: Saad (38:75); A'raf (7:12); Hijr (15:32); Saad (38:76); Hijr (15:33); Isra (17:62).

f) Micro-sequence of God's response: Isra (17:63); A'raf (7:13, 18); Saad (38:77–78); Hijr (15:34–35).

g) Micro-sequence of Iblis's final request to God: Hijr (15:36); Saad (38:79); A'raf (7:14); Hijr (15:37–38); Saad (38:80–81); A'raf (7:15); Isra (17:62).

h) Micro-sequence of Iblis's response and insistence on misleading humans (Adam's progeny): Saad (38:82–83); Hijr (15:39–40); A'raf (7:16–17); Isra (17:62).

i) Micro-sequence of God's response: Isra (17:63–65); Saad (38:84–85).

j) Micro-sequence of God's conclusion and warning to humans: Ya-Sin (36:60).

k) Micro-sequence of Eve: Baqarah (2:35–38); Nisa (4:1); A'raf (7:19–25, 189–192); Ta-Ha (20:117).

l) Micro-sequence of Adam and Eve: A'raf (7:22–27); Ta-Ha (20:121–123); A'raf (7:189).

m) Micro-sequence of Adam's entry into Paradise: Baqarah (2:35); A'raf (7:19); Ta-Ha (20:117–119).

n) Micro-sequence of Satan's temptation and Adam's deception: Ta-Ha (20:120); A'raf (7:20–22); Ta-Ha (20:115, 121); Baqarah (2:37); A'raf (7:23); Ta-Ha (20:122).

o) Micro-sequence of the descent (Adam's fall): Baqarah (2:36); A'raf (7:24–25); Baqarah (2:38); Ta-Ha (20:123–124); A'raf (7:27).

With a closer look at these micro-sequences, we can identify several macro-sequences within them. Next, we will attempt to organize these micro-sequences into macro-sequences

3.3.5. the Micro-Sequences of the Creation Story

Overall, the story of Adam in these surahs takes on a different narrative form based on the presence or absence of one or more functions. In fact, in these surahs, we encounter diverse expressions of a single story: the story of Adam. Thus, this historical sequence can be divided into four main micro-sequences:

1. Micro-sequence of Adam's creation
2. Micro-sequence of the angels' prostration and Iblis's arrogance
3. Micro-sequence of dwelling in Paradise
4. Micro-sequence of the descent (fall)

The question then arises: on what basis are these events and micro-sequences combined? It is evident that the element of time, i.e., the chronological sequence of events, which is predominant in the story of Adam in the "Book of Genesis," is not a prominent feature in the Qur'anic version. When we compare other Qur'anic narratives with those of the Old Testament, we find that the element of time is one of the distinguishing features of Qur'anic stories from those of the Old Testament.

The second principle of structure is causality, or the logic of cause and effect. A closer look reveals that the story of Adam in the Qur'an—from his creation, the angels' prostration, Iblis's arrogance and expulsion, Iblis's request for respite, Adam and his wife's dwelling in Paradise, their temptation by Iblis, and finally Adam's descent—is all based on causality.

The third principle is spatial connection. Here as well, the workshop of creation, Paradise, and ultimately the descent to earth act as unifying factors for the events and micro-sequences. Moreover, the verses concerning Adam's story have spatial and causal links with the verses before and after them in various surahs.

The fourth principle of event combination is character. This is more pronounced and effective in Qur'anic stories compared to the Old Testament. In Qur'anic stories, including the story of Adam, we encounter three main characters: God, Adam (and Eve), and Iblis. The major events and micro-sequences are combined based on the oppositional relationships among these three characters.

Based on these structural principles, we can outline some of the main events within these micro-sequences, scattered across different surahs, as follows:

A) Micro-Sequence of Adam's Creation

1. God informs the angels that He will appoint Adam as His representative on earth (Al-Baqarah 2:30; Sa'd 38:71-72).
2. Adam is prepared for his role as a representative (Al-Baqarah 2:31-33).

B) Micro-Sequence of the Angels' Prostration and Iblis

1. The angels prostrate, but Iblis refuses (Sa'd 38:73-76; Al-A'raf 7:11-12; Ta-Ha 20:116; Al-Isra 17:61; Al-Hijr 15:29-33; Al-Baqarah 2:34).
2. Iblis is cast out from the Divine Presence (Sa'd 38:77-78; Al-A'raf 7:13; Al-Hijr 15:34-35).
3. Iblis asks God for respite until the Day of Judgment, and God grants it (Sa'd 38:79-83; Al-A'raf 7:14-17; Al-Isra 17:62; Al-Hijr 15:36-38).
4. God promises punishment for Iblis and his followers (Al-A'raf 7:18; Sa'd 38:84-85; Al-Isra 17:63; Al-Hijr 15:39-44).
5. God reveals the ways Iblis can lead astray and assures the protection of His devoted servants (Al-Isra 17:64-65).

C) Micro-Sequence of Dwelling in Paradise

1. Adam and his wife dwell in Paradise and are forbidden from approaching a specific tree (Al-Baqarah 2:35; Al-A'raf 7:19).
2. Satan deceives them (Al-Baqarah 2:36; Al-A'raf 7:20-22).
3. They repent (Al-Baqarah 2:37).
4. Adam and his wife recognize their mistake and seek forgiveness (Al-A'raf 7:22-23; Ta-Ha 20:121-122).

D) Micro-Sequence of the Descent

1. They are sent down to earth (Al-Baqarah 2:38-39; Al-A'raf 7:24; Ta-Ha 20:123-126).

What we have presented here is a simplified version of the core events in Adam's story, as mentioned in the Qur'anic surahs. There are, of course, additional minor events or even some core events that we have not covered here, but we will set aside this hierarchical distinction for now.

3.3.6. Composition of Events in the Creation Story

The main question, which pertains to the analysis of the narrative deep structure, is to which macro-sequences or overarching patterns these micro-sequences lead. In the creation story, it seems that if we are to follow Todorov's model, there are three main stages: progression, disorder, and progression again, or, in other words, balance, imbalance, and re-balance. It appears that disorder, chaos, and corruption reign on earth. God informs the angels that He intends to create a being and appoint him as His vicegerent on earth. Thus, the creation of Adam is associated with obedience, peace, order, balance, and, ultimately, life in the fullest sense of the word. Creation takes place despite the angels' objections. God teaches Adam the divine names and instructs him to perform the act of naming. The angels, at God's command, prostrate before Adam, except for Iblis, who was initially among the angels but loses his status due to arrogance. Iblis is expelled from the divine presence, though he is granted respite to seek revenge on God. The first signs of changing equilibrium emerge. Adam and his wife settle in Paradise and are instructed not to approach the tree in the middle of the garden. Iblis, waiting for an opportunity, steps forward and deceives Adam and his wife. The stage of imbalance begins: obedience is abandoned, peace is disrupted, chaos ensues, and, ultimately, life transforms into its contradiction—'non-life' (according to Greimas' model). This 'non-life' is aligned with death, annihilation, and descent. However, in the end, though not immediately, God promises that Adam and his descendants will be granted mercy if they do not follow Iblis's footsteps. Thus, Adam's toil and suffering on earth ultimately conclude with his return to God in a state of forgiveness, and the stage of re-balance begins.

Moreover, Qur'ānic teachings, especially the five fundamental principles of faith—monotheism, prophecy, resurrection, justice, and leadership—also emphasize this general structure of balance, imbalance, and re-balance. If we examine the Qur'ānic stories embedded in the chapters, we realize that these narratives align and integrate with the chapter's themes or main purposes. For example, given that the theme of warning against Satan is one of the main themes of Surahs Al-Isra, Al-Kahf, Maryam, and Ta-Ha, it is natural that the warning to Adam against Satan and his steps is mentioned in these surahs. The admonition against Satan is part of the story of Adam (AS). In fact, it could be said that God,

through the creation of Adam, underscores the principle of His oneness and sends prophets to guide Adam and his descendants. Iblis and his followers oppose the prophets and the righteous, but according to the principle of justice, victory belongs to the righteous, and ultimately, Adam returns to God (the principle of resurrection). Thus, the core of Adam's story, which also applies to other narratives (such as those of Noah, Moses, the Cave, Jonah, and others), can be summarized in three key themes: the call to worship, the rejection of the call and arrogance, and the salvation of believers and destruction of disbelievers.

After examining the creation story based on the order of revelation and historical sequence in both surface and deep narrative structure at the micro and macro levels, one essential topic remains—the inter-surah and inter-narrative relationships among the chapters. Due to limited space and the vastness of the topic, we will restrict this discussion to Surahs Sa'd and Al-Hijr. The fundamental perspective here is that in these seven accounts of the creation story, we encounter seven narrative styles of a single story, with some fixed and variable elements. In Islamic rhetoric studies, these recurring elements in different accounts of a single story are also referred to as "tasreef in expression/Tasreef-al-Bayan".

In Surah Sa'd, the account of Adam's creation, the angels' prostration, Iblis's refusal, and his request for respite are presented. In Surah Al-A'raf, in addition to these elements, the new functions of Iblis's expulsion, Adam and his wife's residence in Paradise, their deception, repentance, and descent are mentioned. In this surah, the enmity between Iblis and Adam is introduced for the first time. This function begins with Iblis's refusal to prostrate to Adam and reaches its climax with Adam's descent to earth. In Surah Ta-Ha, some previous functions from Surahs Sa'd and Al-A'raf are reiterated with new expressions, but a new function also appears: Adam is made aware of Iblis's enmity. Although Adam knows that Iblis did not prostrate to him and indeed disobeyed God, losing his angelic rank as a result, he disregards this warning, which ultimately leads to his descent. In Surah Al-Isra, beyond reiterating previous functions, the cause of Iblis's resentment and animosity toward Adam is revealed—it is the honor and esteem that God has granted Adam. Furthermore, in this surah, another aspect of Iblis's hostility emerges: his eternal hatred for Adam's descendants. Alongside the repetition of certain functions, the method and manner of Adam's and Iblis's creation are also highlighted. Again, Iblis asks for respite from God; God grants it but assures that He will protect His servants. In Surah Al-Baqarah, the previous functions are conveyed in a fresh and distinct style.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the narrative deep structure in Qur'ānic stories reveals recurring patterns that align with Todorov's model of progress, disturbance, and resolution (or equilibrium, disequilibrium, and restored equilibrium). In the creation story, the initial state of chaos and corruption on earth transitions to order, peace, and life through Adam's creation as God's representative. This equilibrium is disrupted by Iblis's rebellion and Adam and his wife's disobedience, introducing chaos, death, and hardship. However, through divine mercy and guidance, a new equilibrium is promised, culminating in Adam's eventual return to God's favor. This structure not only underscores Adam's transformative journey but also mirrors universal themes of human struggle and redemption.

On a broader scale, Qur'ānic principles—such as tawhid (divine oneness), prophethood, resurrection, justice, and leadership—align with this narrative framework. For example, Adam's story illustrates tawhid through his creation and guidance by God, justice through the opposition between Iblis and the prophets, and resurrection in Adam's ultimate return to

God. Similarly, Qur'ānic narratives across various surahs, including Al-Isra, Al-Kahf, Maryam, and Ta-Ha, incorporate these principles, reinforcing core themes like the warning against Satan and the importance of adhering to divine guidance.

The universal applicability of this structure is evident in other Qur'ānic stories, such as those of Noah, Moses, Jonah, and the Companions of the Cave. These narratives follow a similar pattern: the call to worship, resistance and arrogance from the disbelievers, and eventual salvation for the faithful. By framing these stories within a consistent narrative structure, the Qur'ān not only effectively conveys its teachings but also emphasizes the cyclical nature of human experience—progressing from equilibrium to disruption and ultimately, divine restoration. This analysis highlights how Qur'ānic stories encapsulate profound theological principles through a universal narrative grammar, offering a lens to understand the Qur'ān's enduring relevance and its appeal to both spiritual and intellectual inquiry.

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