A Comparative Study of the Third Chapter of Genesis and Quran

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ABSTRACT
The present essay deals with the comparative study of Adam and the forbidden tree in the third chapter of Genesis and the Holy Quran. Attempting to bring both views closer together, this essay justifies phrases as much as possible, finds common points, reduces seemingly contradictory facets, and treats utterances as not being distorted – unless there would be no possible way to do so.

Key Words: Yahweh, Adam, Eve, serpent, Satan, Devil, deception.
Introduction

The Old Testament is a document of Jewish people's commands, prohibitions, and beliefs the survey of which necessitates an investigation of cultural roots of the Hebrew speaking race, as a part of Semitic races, and discovery of grounds of appearance of some myths as well as itinerary of transformation of stories (Hemami, 76-7). Direct exchange of Bedouin and semi-Bedouin people with manifestations of nature provides the ground for making stories and decreasing or increasing historical events (Noss, 485-90; Eliade, 102-3).

To survey Genesis, 3, we cite the phrase in question first and then criticize it, while mentioning the roots of presented discussions as much as possible.

Sin of Adam and Eve?

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (Gen., 3,1).

Deceiving Adam and Eve is attributed to the serpent in the Torah and to the Satan in the Quran: “Then Satan caused them to slip” (2, 36), “Then Satan whispered to them” (7, 20), and “Then Satan whispered to him” (20, 120). Such a difference can be considered in some forms:
1. Absolute opposition between Quran and Torah in this connection

2. Satan appearing in the form of a serpent

3. Serpent being presented symbolically

The point why serpent is a symbol of Satan can itself have some facets:

a) Serpent being a totem in some Bedouins.

b) Fear of serpent

c) Most serpents being beautiful, having compatibility with the environment, and appearing in various forms.

“And he said unto the woman, “Yea, has God said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said unto the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” And the serpent said unto the woman, “You shall not surely die. For God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen., 3, 1-5).

Comparison of this part with the Quran clarifies the following points:

1. For the concept of totem, see Noss,26-7.
1. Approaching is mentioned in the Quran: “Do not approach this tree you two” (2, 35; 7, 19) but not in the Torah. Also, in the Torah the tree is described as being in the midst of the garden. This can be justified in this way that Adam and Eve were settled in the midst of the garden.

2. God’s reasoning for not eating of the tree is superficially incorrect, for He says, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen., 2, 17), and there is no relation between dying and eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This can be justified in this way that dying is presented here symbolically alluding to a new life (a life associated with burden). The Quranic assertion “lest you be evildoers” (2, 35; 7, 20) may refer to this fact that you will pass from convenience of having no burden to the difficulty of bearing burden.

3. In the Torah, prohibition from eating is discussed first, while the primary discussion in the Quran is prohibition from approaching. This can be solved by later Quranic evidence: “But they ate of it” (20, 121).

4. In the Quran the prohibition is directed to Adam and Eve (“Do not approach you two”), while in the Torah the
prohibition is before Eve's creation (Gen., 2, 17). This contradiction can be removed through deliberation upon the verse 121 of sura 20 “And Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred” which attributes the disobedience to Adam, i.e., the prohibition is directed to Adam by essence and to Eve by accident.

5. The serpent being more subtle than any beast of the field (Gen., 3, 1), the tree causing knowledge from Eve’s view (Gen., 3, 6), and the result of eating of the tree being: “And their shameful parts revealed to them” (Q., 20, 121) “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen., 3, 7) all strengthen the possibility of symbolism of the discussion of the tree and its reference to the acceptance of burden.

“She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen., 3, 6). In the Quran, Satanic temptation is directed either to both (Adam and Eve): “Then Satan whispered to them” (7, 20) or to Adam: “Then Satan whispered to him” (20, 120). Here, three probabilities can be assumed:

a) Contradiction between Quran and Torah

b) Quran summarizing the story by omitting a part of it.
The second probability seems to be correct.

“And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” Gen., 3, 7).

In the Quran, there is no word concerning the type of the leaf. Also sewing leaves together is not mentioned in the Quran. Quranic verses apparently imply quick use of the leaf (without sewing them together): “And they quickly took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the garden” (7, 22; 20, 121).

“And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen., 3, 8-9).

In the Quran, there is no word concerning God's walking in the garden and Adam and Eve hiding themselves, and Quranic general view is not in conformity with such utterances: “And not so much as the weight of an ant in earth or heaven escapes...
from your Lord (10, 61) and “Not so much as the weight of an ant in earth or heaven escapes from Him” (34, 3). Of course, one can justify the phrase in Genesis, 3, but such a justification is not that acceptable. However, calling unto Adam and Eve is explicitly mentioned in the Quran “And their Lord called unto them, ‘Did not I prohibit you from this tree, and say to you, verily Satan is for you a manifest foe?’” (7, 22), but without any reference to the quality of that call.

“And he said, ‘I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself’. And He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?’” (Gen., 3, 10-11).

There are some points in this phrase:

1. God is not aware of the place where Adam is hidden as well as the act of eating of the tree. This issue can be considered in this way that it has not been a real questioning, but a reproaching one; otherwise God must be treated as a being with a greatly limited knowledge.

2. Adam's fear is not from disobedience, but from nakedness. It can be concluded from this point that God's prohibition has merely been an advice and not an obligation.
from Adam's view. Also, it has not been outwardly nakedness seemingly, for his nakedness has not been prohibited so that he may worry or feel sinful because of that.

“And the man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat’. And the LORD God said unto the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.’” (Gen., 3, 12-3). The most notable point is that Torah's view is that of their lack of burden and considering themselves sinless, while Quranic view is acceptance of the responsibility of the act and apologizing: “They said, ‘Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost’” (7, 23).

Repentance and Forgiveness, or Punishment?
Torah's view is different from Quranic explanation of what happened after eating of the tree:

1. Quran treats Adam and Eve as being absolutely roused, “They said, ‘Lord, we have wronged ourselves’” (7,23), while there is no sign of that in Genesis.

2. Quran considers the way to repentance open to Adam: “Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and
He turned towards him” (2, 37) and treats him as being chosen by God and having another chance: “Thereafter his Lord chose him, and turned again unto him, and He guided him” (20, 122), while there is no word in Torah in this connection.

Curse, Fall, and Enmity

“And the LORD God said unto the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen., 3, 14-5).

The curse to Satan is mentioned in the Quran too: “Upon you shall rest the curse, till the Day of Doom” (15, 35), “Upon you shall rest My curse, till the Day of Doom” (38, 78), but with one difference, i.e., in the Quran it is before Adam's deception and concerns Satan’s avoiding prostration to Adam, while in the Torah there is no word concerning prostration and the serpent is cursed because of deceiving Eve. It is notable that should we consider the story of eating of the tree symbolic, there would be a relation between cursing the serpent and his
being more subtle, otherwise serpent being subtle and his misleading Eve would not lead to his punishment, for he was not prohibited by God from directing Eve.

Enmity between serpent and the woman and his seed and her seed is not mentioned in the Quran in this way, but rather briefly along with the fall: “He said, ‘Get you down, both of you together, out of it each of you an enemy to each’” (20, 123) which is the fall of Adam and Eve, and “And We said, ‘Get you all down, each of you an enemy of each’” (2, 36) and “We said, ‘Get you down out of it, all together’” (2, 38) which is the fall of more than two persons. It can be justified in this way that in the verse 13 of sura 7 “He said, ‘Get you down out of it’” Satan is commanded to fall and in later verses of the same sura all of them are commanded to do so: “He said, ‘Get you down, each of you an enemy to each’” (7, 24). Al-Tabatabaee also treats the appearance of the context as being addressed to Adam, Eve, and Satan (1, 132).

Anyhow, the enmity of Satan and both Adam and Eve is presented in the Quran as the manifest enmity: “Verily Satan is for you both a manifest foe” (7, 22), but this question remains why Genesis considers the enmity as being between serpent and Eve - and not Adam. In response, these probabilities may
be mentioned:

1. Adam’s deception is considered as happening through Eve. Thus, Adam’s sin also should be attributed to her and hence enmity between Eve and serpent must be more.

2. All seeds of man have mothers, but Jesus has no father. That is why in Revelation, in anti-Christ discussion (12, 4), there is some word concerning a mother attacked by the dragon.

In the Quran, satanic deception commences with “He said, ‘Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals’” (7, 20). Now the question is that how Adam, to whom angels prostrated, disobeyed God to become an angel?

Similarly, should Adam not be destined to experience the life out of Paradise - no matter what Paradise means – to mention “the day they are resurrected” would be senseless, while Satan asks a chance and God accepts: “He said, ‘Respite me till the day they shall be raised. He said, ‘You are among the ones that are respited’” (7, 14-5), “Said he, ‘My Lord, respite me till the day they shall be raised’. Said He, ‘You are among the ones that are respited, unto the day of a known time’” (15, 36-8; 38, 79-81).
Also, why should Satan, who believes in God as the Creator: “You created me of fire, and him You created of clay” (38, 76), in God as the Lord, and in the Resurrection (as proved by verses mentioned above), be ostracized that way? Perhaps the secret lies in the pride: “Have you waxed proud, or are you of the lofty ones?” (38, 75), “Said He, ‘Get you down out of it; it is not for you to wax proud here, so go you forth” (7, 13).

“Unto the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you’” (Gen., 3, 16).

Sorrow and conception may be in conformity with: “His mother bore him painfully, and painfully she gave birth to him” (46, 15), and the husband’s ruling over wife with: “Men are the managers of the affairs of women” (4, 34).

“And unto Adam He said, ‘Because you have hearkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return unto the ground;
for out of it was you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” (Gen., 3, 17-9).

The following points are notable in this part:

1. Cursing the ground

2. “In sorrow all the days of life” may be compared with “Indeed, We created man in trouble” (90, 4), “You are laboring unto your Lord laboriously” (84, 6) on the one hand and with “And in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time” (2, 36; 7, 24) on the other.

3.”Dust you are and unto dust shall you return” is in a notable conformity with: “Out of the earth We created you, and We shall restore you into it, and bring you forth from it a second time” (20, 55)².

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Gen., 3, 20).

Without mentioning names Adam and Eve, the Quran also considers man’s father and mother one: “Mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women” (4, 1).

Similarly, it is mentioned in some traditions that Hawwa

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² In some hadiths, garden of Adam is introduced a garden of this world. See, al-Tabatabae,1,138-9.
“Eve in Arabic) means that she was created of the live, i.e., Adam (Turayhi, 1, 603).

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen., 3, 21).

Cloth is mentioned in the Quran too: “Children of Adam! We have sent down on you a garment to cover your shameful parts, and feathers … Children of Adam! Do not let Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts” (7, 26-7).

The major question, however, is that should utterances of Torah and Quran not be symbolic, what would the phrase “stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts” mean? In other words, what is the relation between eating of the tree and becoming naked? If we consider the tree as the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as Torah says (Gen., 2,17 & 3, 5&22), or treat it as burden, religious reasoning, and Divine Trust (Hemami, 83), the problem can easily be solved; otherwise, we must look for a rational justification.

“And the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for
ever’” (Gen., 3, 22).

The tree of life is not mentioned in the Quran as in Torah, but the tree of eternity is pointed out in Satan’s temptation: “Then Satan whispered to him saying, ‘Adam, shall I point you to the Tree of Eternity, and a Kingdom that does not decay?’” (20, 120).

Two points should be considered in this connection:

1. In the Quran, eating of the tree is mentioned and not of its fruit: “They ate of that tree” (20, 121), while in Torah the fruit is pointed out: “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her” (Gen., 3, 6). “The fruit of the tree of knowledge was a forbidden fruit by whose eating Adam increased a deadly knowledge, sunk into sin, and established an urgent chastisement for himself. Intention of the tree of life is either making certainty or reviving, and the mark of eternal sanctification, satisfaction, and happiness if Adam did not disobey” (Hacks, 376-7). What is seen in this phrase is a kind of justification for this utterance of God: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen., 2, 17), i.e., it is attempted to establish a rational relation between eating of tree of knowledge and death.
2. In this phrase “the man is become as one of us”, it is not specified what is meant by “us”. Is it a reference to a kind of polytheism, or does it mean immaterial beings?³

“Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen., 3, 23-4).

The question is that whether “garden of Eden” means “the garden belonged to Eden” or “the garden called Eden.” Kohan prefers the former: “Torah asserts, ‘And a river went out of Eden to water the garden’ (Gen., 2,10) from which it is inferred that garden is somewhere and Eden is somewhere else” (Kohan, 387)⁴.

3. In principle, imagination of God in various forms, including man, existed in so many religions and Israelites undergone such an illusion due to their relationship with polytheists – as implicitly mentioned in the Quran: “And they came upon a people cleaving to idols they had. They said, ‘Moses, make for us a god, as they have gods’ (7, 138), or their calf worshipping which was promoted by The Samaritan according to the Quran (20:85, 87,95) and by Aaron according to Torah (Exodus, 32). (see Tofighi, 81)

Jews have some signs of anthropomorphism – which prevailed in various people, even ancient Greeks who had a good number of scholars and thinkers – some of which to be found in Genesis, which is absolutely wrong if could not be justified. (see Ashtiyani, 246-52; Hume, 246-7)

4. To survey paradise and Hell from Jewish perspective, see Ashtiyani,
The phrase “And a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” is somehow close to verse 33-5 of sura 55: “O tribe of jinn and of men, if you are able to pass through the confines of heaven and earth, pass through them! You shall not pass through except with an authority. O which of your Lord’s bounties will you and you deny? Against you shall be loosed a flame of fire, and molten brass; and you shall not be helped.”

Suggestion for Further Studies

1. Investigation of “old serpent” in Revelation, especially chapter 12.
2. Survey of background of symbol of serpent in various people especially Semitic Race. For instance, why Moses’ staff changes into serpent (or dragon) and nothing else, and why sorcerers used such a sorcery.

Conclusion

A good number of discussions in the Bible are in a good harmony with the Quran, and some of contradictory parts can be justified. Thus, in encountering seemingly distorted phrases

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of the Bible, one should first look for a good justification in order to bring it closer to the Quran as much as possible.

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