

## Article

## The Multi-Process Creation of the Universe, Earth and the Seven Heavens in the Qur'an

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### Abstract

The Qur'an includes verses that describe three different creation processes. The Universe is created in six phases or aeons or periods of time. The Earth and what it contains are created in a separate process that also extends over six phases. A third process is the creation of the Seven Heavens which started after the creation of Earth and extends over two phases. Creation continues till now and will continue ad infinitum.

**Keywords:** Creation, process, phase, aeon, Qur'an, Bible, universe, earth, heaven, miracle, Seven Heavens.

### I. The Six Days of Creation

The Qur'an asserts that God created the universe (heavens and earth) in six 'days' (سنة أيام). This assertion is repeated in seven different verses: 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 50:38, and 57:4. The Creation days in these verses are not 24-hour days, they are periods of time or aeons.

1. In Verse 7:54, we read:

إن ربكم الله الذي خلق السماوات والأرض في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش يغشي الليل النهار يطلبه حثيثا والشمس والقمر والنجوم مسخرات بأمره ألا له الخلق والأمر تبارك الله رب العالمين. (الأعراف 54).

*VERILY, your Sustainer is God, who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness. He covers the day with the night in swift pursuit, with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command: oh, verily, His is all creation and all command. Hallowed is God, the Sustainer of all the worlds! (Al-A'raf 54).*

2. In Verse 10:3:

إن ربكم الله الذي خلق السماوات والأرض في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش يدبر الأمر ما من شفيع إلا من بعد إذنه ذلكم الله ربكم فاعبدوه أفلا تذكرون. (يونس 3).

*VERILY, your Sustainer is God, who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness, governing all that exists. There is none that could intercede with Him unless He grants leave therefor. Thus is God, your Sustainer: worship, therefore, Him [alone]: will you not, then, keep this in mind? (Yunus 3).*

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## 3. In Verse 11:7:

وهو الذي خلق السماوات والأرض في ستة أيام وكان عرشه على الماء ليبلوكم أيكم أحسن عملا ولئن قلت إنكم مبعوثون من بعد الموت ليقولن الذين كفروا إن هذا إلا سحر مبين. (هود 7).

*And He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons; and [ever since He has willed to create life,] the throne of His almightiness has rested upon water. [God reminds you of your dependence on Him] in order to test you [and thus to make manifest] which of you is best in conduct. For thus it is: if thou sayest [unto men], "Behold, you shall be raised again after death!" - they who are bent on denying the truth are sure to answer, "This is clearly nothing but an enchanting delusion" (Hud 7).*

## 4. In Verse 25:59:

الذي خلق السماوات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش الرحمن فاسأل به خبيراً. (الفرقان 59).  
*He who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness: the Most Gracious! Ask, then, about Him, [the] One who is [truly] aware. (Al-Furqan 59).*

## 5. In Verse 32:4:

الله الذي خلق السماوات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش ما لكم من دونه من ولي ولا شفيع أفلا تتذكرون. (السجدة 4).

*IT IS GOD who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness. You have none to protect you from God, and none to intercede for you [on Judgment Day]: will you not, then, bethink yourselves? (As-Sajda 4).*

## 6. In Verse 50:38:

ولقد خلقنا السماوات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة أيام وما مسنا من لغوب. (ق 38).  
*and [who knows that] We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six aeons, and [that] no weariness could ever touch Us. (Qaf 38).*

## 7. And in Verse 57:4:

هو الذي خلق السماوات والأرض في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش يعلم ما يلج في الأرض وما يخرج منها وما ينزل من السماء وما يعرج فيها وهو معكم أين ما كنتم والله بما تعملون بصير. (الحديد 4).

*He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons, and is established on the throne of His almightiness. He knows all that enters the earth, and all that comes out of it, as well as all that descends from the skies, and all that ascends to them. And He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. (Al-Hadid 4).*

In the above verses, the translator, Muhammad Asad, translated the Arabic word 'ayyam' (days) into 'aeons.'<sup>1</sup> Another translator, Ahmad Ali, translated it into 'spans of time'.<sup>2</sup> And a third one, Shakir, translated it into 'periods of time'.<sup>3</sup>

Upon comparing the Qur'anic creation account with the Biblical creation account, we see the following differences:

1. There is no explicit mention that the days of creation are 24-hour days. There is no mention of: '... And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.', '... And

there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.’, ... etc. as we are told in the account of creation in Genesis.

2. In a subsequent section, the different meanings of ‘day’ (yawm in Arabic) are analyzed. It will be shown that the ‘six-days’ of creation indicate creation in six periods of time or six phases and not six 24-hour days.
3. There is no incorrect and illogical details to the order of creations of light, water, sun and moon, plants, fish, birds, or animals in the Qur’anic account.
4. There is no mention to the creation of Adam and Eve within the six days of the creation. The creation of Adam and Eve was an independent process.
5. There is no mention of a seventh day in which God rested. God is Omnipotent, He doesn’t get tired, and doesn’t need rest. This is explicitly declared in Verse 50:38 above.
6. There is no mention that creation has finished and stopped as implied in Gen. 2:1-3. As a matter of fact, we shall see from other verses in the Qur’an, that creation is continuing to this moment of time and will continue ad infinitum.

Aside from their differences with the Biblical accounts of creation, the above Qur’anic Creation Verses reveal to us the following important aspects:

- a) In five of the above verses (Verses 7:54, 10:3, 25:59, 32:4, and 57:4), we find the phrase ‘استوى على العرش’ immediately following the phrases of creation. This phrase is translated by the different translators in the following: He mounted on the Throne, He established Himself on the Throne, He assumed all power, He ascended the Throne of control, He sat Himself upon the Throne, or He rose over the Throne. These translations are not far from each other. They all portray an image of a God Who is in total control of His creation and is not detached from it. ‘Ascending the Throne of Control’ confirms the attributes of God as: The Sovereign, The Provider, The Sustainer, The Giver, The Protector, The Guardian, The Preserver, The Watchful, The All-Knowing, The All-Seeing, and The All-Hearing.
- b) Verse 11:7 above tells us that God’s Throne is rested upon water. And in another verse, Verse 21:30, we read: “... and We made every living being out of water...”. These verses reflect the importance of water to sustain life. It is interesting to note that modern-day scientists always look for signs of water in their explorations and search for life on other planets.<sup>4</sup>
- c) The Qur’anic creation verses above imply that we are still living in the sixth day, i.e. in the sixth aeon. This may indicate that Day 7 that will follow will be the day-after or the end-of-times.
- d) An Omnipotent Creator has the power to create anything in an instant. The fact that the Qur’an tells us that the creation of the universe was over six periods is an indication that this creation is process based. Here, God created the initial conditions for the process 14

billion years ago. He created the initial material ex nihilo, created time, established the laws of the universe, and initiated the Big Bang, and thus initiated the process of formation of the universe.

## II. The Different Meanings of 'yawm' and 'ayyam' in the Qur'an

The word 'yawm' (day) and its plural 'ayyam' (days) appeared in 367 verses in the Qur'an. In these verses, these words carried different meanings as follows:

- 182 times, they have meanings related to the hereafter, such as: Day of Judgement, Day of Resurrection, Day of Reckoning, Day of Recompense, Day of Gathering, Day of Distinction, Day of Final Decision, Awesome Day, ... etc.
- 151 times, they have the meaning: era, period, age, term, interval, or epoch.
- 21 times, they have the meaning of 24-hour day or days.
- 10 times, Creation Days, and
- 3 times, Special God Days.

The 3 Special God Days are days in which they have specific lengths of time as metaphors for 'a long time'. They appear in Verse 22:47 in which a day is like a thousand years:

ويستعجلونك بالعذاب ولن يخلف الله وعده وإن يوما عند ربك كألف سنة مما تعدون. (الحج 47).  
*And [so, O Muhammad,] they challenge thee to hasten the coming upon them of [God's] chastisement: but God never fails to fulfill His promise - and, behold, in thy Sustainer's sight a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning. (Al-Hajj 47),*

In Verse 23:113, a day is equal a thousand years:

يدبر الأمر من السماء إلى الأرض ثم يعرج إليه في يوم كان مقداره ألف سنة مما تعدون. (السجدة 5).  
*He governs all that exists, from the celestial space to the earth; and in the end all shall ascend unto Him [for judgment] on a Day the length whereof will be [like] a thousand years of your reckoning. (As-Sajda 5),*

And in Verse 70:4, a day is equal to fifty thousand years:

تعرج الملائكة والروح إليه في يوم كان مقداره خمسين ألف سنة. (المعارج 4).  
*all the angels and all the inspiration [ever granted to man] ascend unto Him [daily,] in a day the length whereof is [like] fifty thousand years... (Al-Ma'arij 4)*

The total number of verses in which 'yawm' and 'ayyam' mean 24-hour day or days is 21 verses (less than 6% of the total number of their occurrences.) These verses are mostly related to fasting in general, fasting certain number of days to offset certain sins or compensate incomplete ordinances, to specify certain days to perform Hajj duties, a respite time, or as metaphors of 'a short time'. They are Verses: 2:80, 2:184, 2:185, 2:196, 2:203, 2:259, 3:24, 3:41, 5:89, 7:163, 11:65, 18:19, 20:104, 22:28, 23:113, 26:155, 34:18, 40:49, 41:16, 62:9, and 69:7.

The 10 verses that have the Creation Days are Verses: 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 41:9, 41:10, 41:12, 50:38, and 57:4. Some translators of the meaning of the Qur'an, such as Hilali and Khan<sup>5</sup>, Maududi<sup>6</sup>, Pickthall<sup>7</sup> and Yusuf Ali<sup>8</sup>, used the literal translations of 'day' and 'days' for 'yawm'

and 'ayyam.' Others, such as Muhammad Asad<sup>9</sup>, Ahmad Ali<sup>10</sup>, and Shakir<sup>11</sup>, translated them into aeon(s), span(s) of time, or period(s) of time, respectively. In all of these cases, however, all the translators are unanimous in the understanding that the Creation Days are not 24-hour days.

### III. Miracle (Instant) Creation

The Qur'an contains 8 verses that describe creation by the word 'kun' (Be). This is a miraculous instant creation, and it may be an essential first phase of the process-based creation. These verses are:

#### 1. Verse 2:117:

بديع السماوات والأرض وإذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون. (البقرة 117).

*The Originator is He of the heavens and the earth: and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" -and it is. (Al-Baqara 117),*

It is mentioned in a previous section that the creation of the universe (heavens and the earth) was process-based. However, God created the initial conditions by the word 'kun' (Be).

#### 2. Verse 3:47:

قالت رب أنى يكون لي ولد ولم يمسنني بشر قال كذلك الله يخلق ما يشاء إذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون. (آل عمران 47).

*Said she: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" [The angel] answered: "Thus it is: God creates what He wills when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be' - and it is. (Al-Imran 47),*

This verse describes the miraculous creation of Jesus. Mary may have an egg in her uterus, and God caused this egg to be fertilized by the word 'kun' (Be). This initiated the process of creating Jesus without a father. In Surah#19 (Surah: Maryam), there are several verses that indicate that Mary witnessed the whole phases of pregnancy and child delivery like any other woman. So, the miraculous creation of Jesus was in the initial fertilization of the egg without semen from a male.

#### 3. Verse 3:59:

إن مثل عيسى عند الله كمثل آدم خلقه من تراب ثم قال له كن فيكون. (آل عمران 59).

*Verily, in the sight of God, the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said unto him, "Be" - and he is. (Al-Imran 59),*

This verses tells us that the creation of Jesus is similar to the creation of Adam; their creations were both miraculously initiated by the word 'kun' (Be), but then went through the same process of fetus formation, pregnancy, and delivery. The verse indirectly rejects the notion that Adam was first molded into the shape of a full grown man and then brought to life as a full grown man.

The second part of the verse says that both of Jesus and Adam were created of 'تراب' which is translated into 'dust'; a better translation would have been 'soil', or 'earth.' In any case, this affirms that both of Adam and Jesus were normal human beings whose composition was of the

same components that are found on earth: minerals, organic material, and water. In other words, they were not godly or alien beings.

#### 4. Verse 6:73:

وهو الذي خلق السماوات والأرض بالحق ويوم يقول كن فيكون قوله الحق وله الملك يوم ينفخ في الصور عالم الغيب والشهادة وهو الحكيم الخبير. (الأنعام 73).

*And He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth - and whenever He says, "Be," His word comes true; and His will be the dominion on the Day when the trumpet [of resurrection] is blown. He knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind: for He alone is truly wise, all-aware. (Al-An'am 73),*

This verse tells us that on the Day of Resurrection, the people will be resurrected by the word 'kun' (Be).

#### 5. Verse 16:40:

إنما قولنا لشيء إذا أردناه أن نقول له كن فيكون. (النحل 40).

*Whenever We will anything to be, We but say unto it Our word "Be" -and it is. (An-Nahl 40),*

In Verse 16:38 that precedes the above one, we read that the disbelievers say: "Never will God raise from the dead anyone who has died!" Verse 16:40 responds to this denial by asserting that resurrection of the dead will be by the word 'kun' (Be).

#### 6. Verse 19:35:

ما كان لله أن يتخذ من ولد سبحانه إذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون. (مريم 35).

*It is not conceivable that God should have taken unto Himself a son: limitless is He in His glory! When He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it "Be" -and it is! (Maryam 35),*

This verse dismisses the claim that Jesus is the son of God, and asserts that Jesus was another human being who was initially created by the word 'kun' (Be).

#### 7. Verse 36:82:

إنما أمره إذا أراد شيئا أن يقول له كن فيكون. (يس 82).

*His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" — and it is. (Ya-Sin 82),*

This verse should be examined in the context of the 11 verses that precede it. These verses describe several acts of creation, and they end by asserting that the One Who initially created all these things is capable to create and resurrect people again on the Day of Resurrection. Then, Verse 36:82 asserts that when God wills a thing to be, He just says unto it, 'kun' (Be) - and it is.

#### 8. And Verse 40:68:

هو الذي يحيي ويميت فإذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون. (غافر 68).

*It is He who grants life and deals death; and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" - and it is. (Ghafir 68).*

Every minute, many life forms (humans, animals and other life forms) come into existence, and many die and cease to exist. All these happens by the will of God, and the word 'kun' (Be). God is the Life-Giver, and He is the Life-Taker.

#### IV. The Multiple Processes of Creation

In Surah#41, Verses 9-12, the Qur'an describes several processes related to the creation of the universe.

قل أنتم لتكفرون بالذي خلق الأرض في يومين وتجعلون له أندادا ذلك رب العالمين (9) وجعل فيها رواسي من فوقها وبارك فيها وقدر فيها أقواتها في أربعة أيام سواء للسائلين (10) ثم استوى إلى السماء وهي دخان فقال لها وللأرض ائتيا طوعا أو كرها قالتا أتينا طائعين (11) فقضاهن سبع سموات في يومين وأوحى في كل سماء أمرها وزينا السماء الدنيا بمصابيح وحفظا ذلك تقدير العزيز العليم (12) (فصلت 9-12)

9. SAY: "Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two aeons? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Sustainer of all the worlds?"

10. For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: [and all this He created] in four aeons.

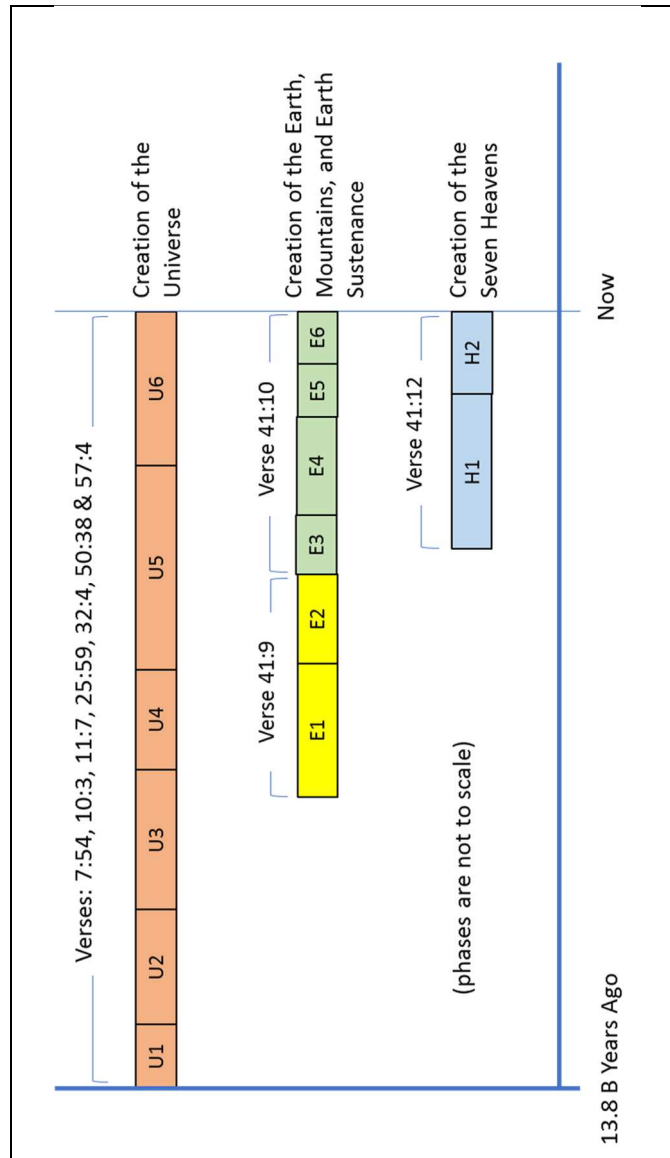
11. And He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke; and He [it is who] said to them and to the earth, "Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" - to which both responded, "We do come in obedience."

12. And He [it is who] decreed that they become seven heavens in two aeons, and imparted unto each heaven its function. And We adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure: such is the ordaining of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. (Fussilat 9-12).

We have discussed before that the creation of the universe in six phases extended over 13.8 billion years according to scientific estimate. Within this period, Verse 41:9 above describes another process in which the earth was created in two phases. This is followed in Verse 41:10 by the erection of firm mountains and the creation of sustenance (water and plants) in four phases. So, the total phases of the creation of the earth and the erection of the mountains and the creation of earth's sustenance is 6 phases.

Then, Verse 41:12 describe another process in which The Seven Heavens were created in two phases. This process is examined in more detail in a separate paper.<sup>12</sup>

Some readers of the above verses may mistakenly assume that these verses describe a single process, and add the number of days mentioned in the verses to find that they total eight days, and hence consider this a contradiction to the creation of the universe in six days. But, in reality, these verses describe multiple processes that are separate from the creation of the universe process as will be demonstrated below.



**Figure 1.** The Qur’anic View of the Different Creation Processes

Figure 1 illustrates the Qur’anic view of the different creation processes. The upper timeline is the creation of the universe in six days. These days are designated U1, U2, U3, U4, U5 & U6. The start of U1 is the ‘Big Bang’. The total duration of the six days represents the age of the universe, and it is 13.8 billion years as cosmology’s best estimate (the Qur’an does not mention this duration.) The verses in the Qur’an that relate to this process (discussed in Section I) are given on top of the timeline.

The middle timeline is composed of two parts: the creation of the earth in two days (Verse 41:9), and the creation of the mountains and earth sustenance in four days (Verse 41:10.). The creation days of these two processes are designated E1, E2 ,E3, E4, E5 and E6.



Finally, the creation of The Seven Heavens in two days, H1 and H2 (Verse 41:12), is shown in the lower timeline. The start of the H1 is after the end of E2 as indicated in the verse.

It should be noted that the bars that represent the different creation days in the three timelines are not drawn to scale. The purpose of figure is to show the three creation processes relative to each other and that they are separate processes.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the Qur'anic view of the creation of the universe is in full agreement with science. The Qur'an is not a book of science or cosmology. Therefore, you will not find any verses that discuss the details about the age of the universe or the age of the earth; these details are left to be decided by scientific methods and discovery.

## V. The Big Bang, The Expanding Universe

The Qur'an contains other verses that relate closely to the creation of the universe. Verse 21:30 describes a process at the beginning of creation that closely resembles the 'Big Bang' theory of the origin of the universe.

أولم ير الذين كفروا أن السماوات والأرض كانتا رتقا ففتقناهما وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي أفلا يؤمنون. (الأنبياء 30).  
*ARE, THEN, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder? – and [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they not, then, [begin to] believe? (Al-Anbiya 30)*

The first part of the above verse states that the heavens and earth were once one single entity and then this entity was parted asunder to start the creation of the universe. This initial breakup or separation was not an explosion, but a process in which the components of an entity were teared and separated from each other. This is exactly the core of the Big Bang theory.<sup>13</sup>

The expansion of the universe is an essential ingredient of the Big Bang theory. Amazingly, there is a verse in the Qur'an, Verse 51:47, that tells us that the universe is steadily expanding:

والسمااء بنيناها بأيد وإنا لموسعون. (الذاريات 47).  
*AND IT IS We who have built the universe with [Our creative] power; and, verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it. (Adh-Dhariyat 47)*

Stephen Hawking, in his book, 'A Brief History of Time', says, "The discovery that the universe is expanding was one of the great intellectual revolutions of the 20th century."<sup>14</sup> The Qur'an mentioned the expansion of the universe in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Another verse that relates to the Big Bang theory is Verse 41:11 that tells us that the universe was in a form like smoke, and God commanded it to form into the heaven and the earth.

ثم استوى إلى السماء وهي دخان فقال لها وللأرض ائتيا طوعا أو كرها قالتا أتينا طائعين. (فصلت 11).

*And He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke; and He [it is who] said to them and to the earth, "Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" - to which both responded, "We do come in obedience." (Fussilat 11)*

The above verse is in full agreement with science that tells us that after the Big Bang, the matter in the universe was uniformly distributed. Then slightly denser regions attracted nearby matter and started forming gas cloud (or smoke clouds). These clouds then condensed and formed the stars, galaxies, and the other astronomical structures observable today.

Interestingly, science has no explanation to what made these clouds of matter coalesce and start forming the galaxies. The above verse tells us the it was the Will of God behind all creation.

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