

Article

The Seven Heavens in the Qur'an: A Proposed Model

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Abstract

There are nine verses in the Qur'an that describe the creation of Seven Heavens. These Seven Heavens are of such grandeur that puts them in an almost equal footing with The Great Throne. The current models of these Seven Heavens are reviewed and found to be unsatisfactory. The characteristics of these Seven Heavens are inferred from the verses that describe them, and a new model is proposed.

Keywords: Creation, process, heavens, throne, grandeur, wormholes, Qur'an, Bible.

I. What the Qur'an Says

The Qur'an describes the creation of a unique cosmological entity, The Seven Heavens (TSH), that was not mentioned in the Bible. The creation of TSH is mentioned in the Qur'an in nine different verses which is an indication to their utmost importance. These Verses are: 2:29, 17:44, 23:86, 41:12, 65:12, 67:3, 71:15, 78:12, and 23:17.

1- Verse 2:29:

هو الذي خلق لكم ما في الأرض جميعا ثم استوى إلى السماء فسواهن سبع سماوات وهو بكل شيء عليم. (البقرة 29)
He it is who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything. (Al-Baqarah 29).

The above verse tells us that the creation of TSH started after the start of the creation of the earth. This fact was discussed in another paper in which three independent creation processes are identified: creation of the Universe, creation of the Earth and its contents, and creation of TSH.¹ A diagram is included there to demonstrate the timings of the different processes to each relative to each other.

2- Verse 17:44:

تسبح له السماوات السبع والأرض ومن فيهن وإن من شيء إلا يسبح بحمده ولكن لا تفقهون تسبيحهم إنه كان حليما غفورا. (الإسراء 44)

The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! Verily, He is forbearing, much-forgiving! (Al-Isra 44).

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The above verse includes a Qur'anic metaphor that when an inanimate object follows certain natural laws perpetually, it is actually worshipping God. So, when a celestial body spins around itself, or moves in an orbit around a star, these are all acts of worshiping; it is extolling God and prostrating to Him. The above verse asserts that everything, TSH, the earth, and all that they contain, all of that worship God by following their natural laws perpetually.

There are several other verses that contain the same metaphor described above (that inanimate object worship God by following its natural laws perpetually.) These are Verses: 13:13, 13:15, 16:49, 22:18, 24:41, 38:18, 59:24, 62:1, and 64:1.

The phrase '*and all that they contain*' in the above verse indicates that TSH contain stars and planets and other celestial objects like our universe. They are also probably populated with different life forms; all of which extols the glory of God.

3- Verse 23:86:

قل من رب السماوات السبع ورب العرش العظيم. (المؤمنون 86)

Say: "Who is (the) Lord of the seven heavens, and (the) Lord of the Great Throne?" (Al-Mu'minun 86).

The above verse contains the phrase 'العرش العظيم' translated into 'The Great Throne'. The Great Throne is the Throne of God Almighty. The rhetorical question in the verse puts TSH in an almost equal footing with The Great Throne. This glorifies TSH and indicates that they are more grandeur than our universe.

4- Verse 41:12:

ففضاهن سبع سماوات في يومين وأوحى في كل سماء أمرها وزينا السماء الدنيا بمصابيح وحفظا ذلك تقدير العزيز العليم. (فصلت 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 12)

The above verse indicates that the start of the creation of TSH was after the start of the creation of the earth. The verse tells us also that each of TSH has its own laws, material, celestial bodies, and life forms. Furthermore, the verse tells us that all the stars we observe in the night sky are 'lamps' in the lower heaven (Heaven1.) This means that our universe is Heaven1.

5- Verse 65:12:

الله الذي خلق سبع سماوات ومن الأرض مثلهن ينتزل الأمر بينهن لتعلموا أن الله على كل شيء قدير وأن الله قد أحاط بكل شيء علما. (الطلاق 12).

GOD is He who has created seven heavens, and, like them, [the many aspects] of the earth. Through all of them flows down from on high, unceasingly, His [creative] will, so that you might come to know that God has the power to will anything, and that God encompasses all things with His knowledge. (At-Talaq 12).

The above verse tells us that similar to the creation of TSH, there exist multiple earths. This again indicates that each of TSH is populated with its own stars, planets and celestial bodies.

Some Muslim scholars propose the existence of duplicate planets to our Earth, and that these planets are populated with people counterparts to every one of us. The second part of the verse mentions that Allah's commands cover all these heavens and planets, and it may support the hypothesis of duplicate creation.

6- Verse 67:3:

الذي خلق سبع سماوات طباقا ما ترى في خلق الرحمن من تفاوت فارجع البصر هل ترى من فطور. (المالك 3)
Who has created the seven heavens one above another, you can see no fault in the creations of the Most Beneficent. Then look again: "Can you see any rifts?" (Al-Mulk 3).

The first part of the above verse tells us that TSH are on top of each other. The latter part of the verse asks us to examine these heavens with our vision. This may indicate that TSH are observable (or, should be observable) using the scientific tools and methods developed by man. If TSH are not observable using current technology, then the verse predicts that man will be able to develop, at some time in the future, the technology (or the scientific theory) that enables him to observe or detect TSH.

7- Verse 71:15:

ألم تروا كيف خلق الله سبع سماوات طباقا. (نوح 15)
See you not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another, (Nuh 15).

The above verse is similar to Verse 67:3 and it tells us that TSH are layered one above another. Again, the rhetorical question in the verse starts with the phrase 'See you not...' This may also be an indication to the observability or detectability of TSH.

8- Verse 78:12:

وبنينا فوقكم سبعا شدادا. (النبأ 12)
And We have built above you seven strong (heavens), (An-Naba' 12).

The above verse use the word 'شدادا' which means 'strong' of 'solid'. This indicates that TSH should have well-defined structures and boundaries.

9- And Verse 23:17:

ولقد خلقنا فوقكم سبع طرائق وما كنا عن الخلق غافلين. (المؤمنون 17).
We have indeed fashioned above you seven paths. Never were We unaware of the task of creation. (Al-Mu'minun 17).

The translation by Maududi is adopted here in which he translated the Arabic phrase 'سبع طرائق' into 'seven paths'.² Pickthall also translated it into 'seven paths'.³ And another translator, Ahmed Ali, translated it into 'seven highways'.⁴

II. Characteristics of the Seven Heavens

So, the questions to be answered are the following: What are these Seven Heavens? And, where are they?

To answer these questions, we need to look first for clues from the above verses about the characteristics and features of these Seven Heavens. Here are some of the features of TSH that are inferred from the above verses:

- **Feature#1:** The creation of TSH may be a greater feat than the creation of the universe in six days. This is because the former creation is repeated in nine verses, whereas the latter is repeated in seven verses. This feature can also be inferred from Verse 23:86 above in which TSH are put in an almost equal footing with The Great Throne.
- **Feature#2:** The creation of TSH started after the start of the creation of earth. This is inferred from Verse 2:29 and Verse 41:12 above.
- **Feature#3:** The Seven Heavens have well-defined structures and boundaries. This is inferred from Verse 78:12. There are also several other verses that indicate that the heavens have strong well-defined structures, such as: Verses 2:22 (*... and the sky a canopy...*), Verse 40:64 (*... and the sky a canopy...*), and Verses 79:27-28 (*Are you more difficult to create than the heaven which He has built? High has He reared its vault and formed it in accordance with what it was meant to be.*)
- **Feature#4:** The Seven Heavens are most likely layered on top of each other. This is inferred from Verse 71:15 and Verse 67:3.
- **Feature#5:** Each of TSH contains stars, planet and other celestial objects similar to our universe, and they also populated with different life forms. This is inferred from Verse 65:12 and Verse 17:44.
- **Feature#6:** Our universe is the lower heaven (Heaven1). This is inferred from Verse 41:12.
- **Feature#7:** The Seven Heavens are detectable (or, should be detectable) using the scientific tools and methods developed by man. This is inferred from Verse 67:3 '*you can see...*' and Verse 71:15 '*See you not how...*'
- **Feature#8:** There may exist paths that facilitate the movement between TSH. This is inferred from Verse 23:17 above. It is also corroborated by Verse 51:7 which says 'والسماوات ذات الحبك', and is translated into 'By the heaven full of paths' These paths could be understood to mean the orbits in which the different celestial objects move. But it could also be understood to mean 'wormholes' that link TSH to each other.

III. Current Models of the Seven Heavens

Many Muslim scholars have attempted to answer the two basic questions related to TSH: What and Where are these Seven Heavens? In this section, we examine some of these attempts.

A. The Seven Heavens are the Layers of the Atmosphere:

Earth's atmosphere is divided into five main layers: the exosphere, the thermosphere, the mesosphere, the stratosphere and the troposphere. Within these five main layers, several secondary layers could be distinguished. These are; the ozone layer, the ionosphere, the homosphere, the heterosphere, and the planetary boundary layer.

So how many layers are in the atmosphere? The answer could be 5, if we restrict these layer to the main layers of the atmosphere. It could be 7, if we add the ozone layer and the ionosphere to the five main layers. Or, it could be 10, if we consider the main layers in addition to all of the other secondary layers.

As for the proposition that the Seven Heavens are the layers of the atmosphere, it satisfies **Feature#4** that tells us that the Seven Heaves are layered on top of each other. It also satisfies **Feature#2**, for the atmosphere was formed in its stable form well after the creation of the earth. It also satisfies **Feature#7**, because the atmospheric layers are detectable and measurable using current technology.

This model, however, does not satisfy the other features. To start with, the earth atmosphere is a small part of the earth system, and its creation cannot be considered more grandeur than the creation of the universe as called for by **Feature#1**. Secondly, the atmospheric layers are not strong structures and do not have clear boundaries as required by **Feature#3**. Thirdly, **Feature#5** and **Feature#6** are not satisfied because the earth atmosphere does not include within it any stars, planets, or celestial bodies. And finally, **Feature#8** is not satisfied for there are no paths or highways within the atmospheric layers.

Based on the above, the proposition that the Seven Heavens are the atmospheric layers is rejected.

B. The Seven Heavens are Seven Planets:

In this proposition, TSH are proposed to be seven planets (beside earth) that revolve around the sun. Namely, they are: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

This proposition is also rejected for it satisfies **Feature#3** and **Feature#7** only, but it does not satisfy **Feature#1**, **Feature#2**, **Feature#4**, **Feature#5**, **Feature#6**, or **Feature#8**.

C. The Seven Heavens are the Seven Phases of the Big Bang Timeline:

According to the Big Bang Theory, the universe evolved to be the way it is today over several phases as follows:⁵

1. From $t = 0$ (the beginning of time) to $t = 10^{-32}$ sec., we have the start of the Big Bang and the universe was in pure energy form; it was very dense and very hot.

2. Between $t = 10^{-32}$ sec. to $t = 10^{-4}$ sec., we have the post-inflation phase. In this phase, the universe was a 'soup' of quarks, electrons, and other particles. The temperature was still very hot in the range of 10^{27} °C.
3. Between $t = 10^{-4}$ sec. to $t = 1$ sec., we had a rapid cooling phase in which the temperature dropped to about 10^{13} °C. In this phase, protons and neutrons started to form.
4. Between $t = 1$ sec. to $t = 3$ min., cooling continued and the temperature dropped to 10^8 °C. This allowed the nuclei of the atoms to start forming. But the temperature was still too hot for the atoms to form. The charged electrons in this phase prevented light from escaping.
5. Between $t = 3$ min. to $t = 300,000$ yrs., the temperature dropped to about $10,000$ °C. Electrons combined with protons and neutrons to form atoms, mostly hydrogen and helium. Light was allowed to escape and to shine.
6. Between $t = 300,000$ yrs. to $t = 1$ billion yrs., the temperature dropped to -200 °C. Gravity made hydrogen and helium gas coalesce to form the giants clouds that will become galaxies. Smaller chumps of gas collapsed to form the first stars.
7. Between $t = 1$ billion yrs. to $t = 3$ billion yrs., the first galaxies and the first stars appeared.
8. Between $t = 3$ billion yrs. to $t = 9$ billion yrs., galaxies clustered together under gravity. The first stars died and spewed heavy elements into space; those elements formed new stars and planets. By the end of this phase, the sun and solar system started to take shape.

Can the phases of the evolution of the universe be a satisfactory model to the Seven Heavens mentioned in the Qur'an?

It is apparent from the above that the Big Bang Timeline model represents the evolution of our universe; so, we are not talking about a creation that is more splendid or magnificent than the creation of our universe. This means **Feature#1** is not satisfied.

Secondly, in this model, we are not talking about seven physical entities that exist today. The model shows us how our universe (the same entity) looked like over different periods of time. **Therefore, Feature#2, Feature#3, and Feature#4** are not satisfied.

Feature#5 is not satisfied as well because the stars, planets, and other celestial objects start appearing when the universe was 1 billion years old. Before that, it was in the form of pure energy, and then evolved to become basic particles, and then further evolved to be in the form of clouds of hydrogen and helium atoms. This means that stars, planets, and other celestial object did not exist in phase 1 through phase 5.

Based on the above, the Big Bang phases can't be considered a satisfactory model of TSH.

IV. A Proposed New Model of the Seven Heavens

Figure 1 shows the new proposed model of TSH. In this model, the smallest circle represents the 1st Heaven (Heaven1) which is our universe. The second inner circle in the figure represents the outer boundary of the 2nd heaven or Heaven2. Heaven2 does not encapsulate our universe only; it contains many universes (Heaven1s) like our own, may be billions of them. This is illustrated in Fig. 2.

The third circle in Fig. 1 represents the outer boundary of Heaven3, which in turn contains billions of Heaven2s. This continues until we reach the final heaven, Heaven7, which also contains billions of Heaven6s.

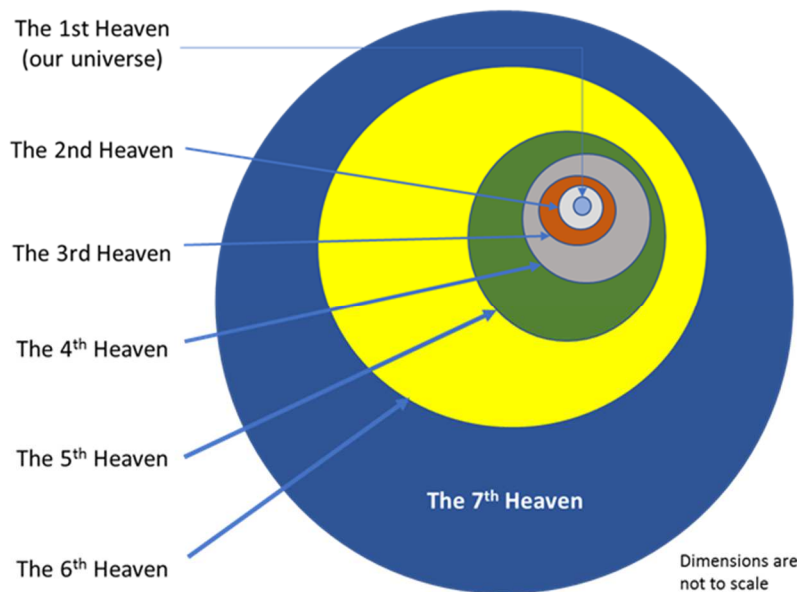


Figure 1. A Proposed Model of the Seven Heavens

This model introduces a creation feat of such grandeur that is beyond imagination. We must recall that our planet, earth, is a tiny entity in the universe. In this model, our universe is a tiny entity inside Heaven2, which in turn is a tiny entity inside Heaven3, and so on.

It is obvious that the proposed model for TSH satisfies **Feature#1** for we have here a creation feat with a grandeur that it can be considered in equal footing with The Great Throne.

Feature#2 is also satisfied if we consider our universe, Heaven1, to be the oldest entity in the model. As more universes were created, Heaven2 started to form. And as more the likes of Heaven2 were created and formed, Heaven3 started to take shape, and so on. So, in this model, Heaven2 is younger than Heaven1, and Heaven3, is younger than Heaven2. As we reach Heaven7, it is possible that it started to take shape within the last 3-4 billion years, i.e. after the creation of earth and its sustenance, which satisfies **Feature#2**.

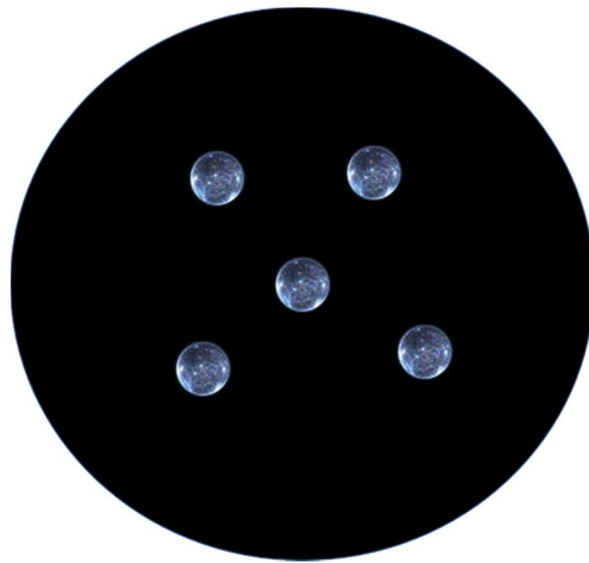


Figure 2. Heaven2 Contains Billions of Heaven1s

As we go over the other features of TSH, we can see that the proposed model clearly satisfies **Feature#3, Feature#4, Feature#5, and Feature#6**. As to **Feature#8** which indicates the existence of paths or highways in the heavens, even science is not certain about the nature of a wormhole. It is, till now, a speculative structure that links between two points in spacetime as a special solution of Einstein field equations.

The only feature that is not satisfied in the proposed model in a definite way is **Feature#7**, which states that TSH are detectable (or, should be detectable) using the scientific tools and methods developed by man. Current technologies can't detect anything beyond our universe. The proposed model suggests vast distances beyond anything that can be imagined by human mind. No future technology is expected to detect these dimensions. The only way to detect the other six heavens beyond Heaven1 is through a new cosmic theory, and a mathematical model that takes into consideration the influence of the outer heavens on Heaven1.

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