Future Imagery in the Holy Quran: A Reflection on Semantics Position of "Paradise" in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān

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Abstract

Considerable numbers of Quranic verses have addressed a prognostic description of sections ahead and the world and human conditions in them. Among the verses, some represent an image of Paradise attributes and People of Paradise characteristics. Paradise after the resurrection, Purgatory Heavens, Paradise Gardens, and Adam Garden are four examples of the term "Paradise" counted in the Quran interpretation books. After discerning potentials of bewildering example finding in the Quran verses, this article interpretively has discussed "Jannat" in the one hundred thirty third Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān, indicating the given "Jannat" could not include in the mentioned four examples. Reflecting on the accessible evidence in other verses and traditions about the world conditions on the eve of the resurrection and the advent of Imam Mahdi (pbuh), reveals that this paradise will actualize in this world, before Day of Resurrection, at the end of wars between right and wrong, next to the appearance of Imam Mahdi (pbuh). Actually, religious references in the topic of elucidating prognostic end of the world, explain paradise, in which covers the heavens and the earth with its scope; namely, Paradise of Mahdavi Land.

Keywords: Futures studies, End times, Imam Mahdi (pbuh), Paradise, Resurrection

Introduction

Significant numbers of Quranic verses have addressed a description of sections ahead of humankind. Among the verses, some describe Paradise and represent an image of People of Paradise life. Contemplation on Shiites and Sunnis Interpretation Books implies that interpreters have counted four examples of the term "Paradise": Paradise after the resurrection such as the 82th verse of Baqarih, Purgatory Heavens in which right people go there after death (Ṭabātabāī, 1417: 1/139) like the 26th verse of Yāsīn, Paradise Gardens such as the 39th verse of Kahf, and Adam Garden in the 35th verse of Baqarih. However, determining true example of the word "Jannat" in some verses is arguable among interpreters.

This paper with interpretational scrutiny of the 133th verse of Āl-i 'Amrān describing one of the sections ahead, shows that the mentioned Paradise in the verse that is posed with this adjective clause: "a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth", does not match with those four examples in Interpretation Books. In the next stage, with the obtained evidences from those verses that explain the heavens and the earth system evolutions before the resurrection, it can be deduced that this paradise will actualize before Day of Resurrection and in this world. Then, considering conditions and features of sections ahead until the establishment of the resurrection, based on what is
drawn on the Quran and the traditions, leads us to the point that the realization of this paradise occurs after the right front victory in the wars after the advent of Imam Mahdi (as).

Since the beginning, "Jannat" put forth in the given verse and the features mentioned for it have attracted interpreters and companions of the Prophet (pbuh) and even non-Muslims in the world. Ibn Shahr Āshub quotes about occasion of revelation of the 43th verse of Nahl that "Ka'b Al-Ashraf", a rabbi, asked the second caliph about "a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth", and because he did not get an answer, he put his question to Amir (as). After Amir (as) answered to the Jewish man question, the verse "So ask the Followers of the Reminder if you do not know" was sent (Ibn Shahr Āshub, 1379: 2/353). Questions were asked about this "Jannat" from the Prophet (pbuh) (Al-Arūsī, 1415: 1/389), and Imams (pbut) (Ayyāšī, 1380: 1/198), and interpreters from the Companions (Ṭabarī, 1412: 4/60), or referral of Ibn Abbas to one of People of the Book scholar asking about this "Jannat" (Ṣuyūṭī, 1404: 2/7) are examples of trying in the early Islam to understand the precise denotation of this verse.

In the view of Muslim interpreters and specifically Sunni interpreters, some verses about Mahdaviat and End times' events are included in Day of Resurrection verses, and events mentioned in these verses are considered in the Resurrection events. This confusing has a long history among interpretation works, and Shiite Imams (pbut) have always criticized them.

For example, Imam Sadiq (as) rejecting the popular opinion expressed in the 83th verse of Naml that Hashr is the resurrection, believes with the reason that it refers to Throwback Era (Bahhrānī, 1374: 4/228).

He also counted "Al-Ākhirah" in the 20th verse of Shurā as right administration in Imam Mahdi (as) era and said in the meaning of "and he hath no share in the Hereafter" that it is "he hath no share in right administration with Imam Mahdi (as)" (Kuleinī, 1407: 1/436). While, in Sunni and Shia interpretations, this verse have been recognized as the resurrection. (Abualfutūḥ Rāzī, 1408: 17/113; Maḥālī, Suyūṭī, 1416: 488; Ṭabarī, 1412: 25/14).

This confusion does exists in Sunni Interpretations further. The reason of this issue can be found in the policy of Umayyah Caliphs and Rulers, not registering cited tradition and sayings of Prophet, which leads to the loss of evidence that helps understanding the Quran. Moreover; political atmosphere against Shiite Imams (as) has caused only a few stories about Mahdavi verses by Ahlul-Bayt (as).

The second reason may be the similarities between the story of Imam Mahdi (as) and the establishment of the resurrection there. According to Shiite traditions and verses, with the appearance of Imam Mahdi (as) some events such as the distinction between good and bad people, (Ḥorr 'Aāmilī, 1425: 5/89; Ṭūsī, 1411: 339), the return of some dead (Qomī, 1404: 1/24), revealing some hidden things (Ḥillī, 1421: 446), judgment among Servants of God (Kuleinī, 1407: 1/370), and administration of justice (Mas'ūdī, 1426: 217) shall happen, in which these events occur in a wider area and with more intensity. This similarities has led some commentators go wrong to interpret and select the verses' case.

In addition, the three events of Imam Mahdi (as) appearance, the return of dead, and the resurrection, from which these periods have been known as the days of Allah in Shiite tradition (Ibn Babiveih, 1362: 1/108; Ibn Babiveih, 1403: 366; Ḥorr 'Aāmilī, 1425: 5/72), can be counted as rise of the right steps; by stating that these three meanings are united in the truth, and their difference ensues due to the steps of rising the right (Ṭabāṭābāī, 1412: 2/109). Because of the unity and congruity among the events: the rise, the return, and the resurrection, the concepts discussed in some verses could be considered for each event. For instance, Ṭabāṭābāī in the interpretation of the 210th verse of Baqarih, after referring to a hadith by Imam Baqir (as) in 'Aayāshī Interpretation that this verse interpreted to the resurrection ('Aayāshī, 1380, 1/103), a hadith by Imam Sadiq (as) that this verse interpreted to the resurrection (Majlisī, 1403: 53/43), and another hadith in 'Aayāshī Interpretation, which assumed the verse relating to the appearance of Imam Mahdi (as) ('Aayāshī, 1380: 1/103), writes:

"There are a lot like these tradition; if you want to see Hadith Books page to page, you will see that many Traditions by Ahlul-Bayt (as) in the interpretation of many verses that said this is related to the resurrection, or said related to the return, or have said: related to the appearance of Imam Mahdi (as); and this is not only for the sake of unity and congruence of these three meanings" (Ṭabāṭābāī, 1417: 2/106).

The issue dealt in the paper is about this topic. This paper attempts to determine the case of one verse that describes some of the future sections to see whether this section points to the era of Imam Mahdi (as) or the resurrection.

2 Interpreters opinion
Ṭabāṭabāī has said the term "Ṣārī'ū" is rooted from the infinitive "Musāri'aa" that means the intensity of speed (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 4/20). Interpreters have put forth this word is synonymous with "Bādirū" signifying "rush to do the work and result" (Ṭabarsī, 1372: 2/836; Ṭabārī, 1412: 4/59; Sheibānī, 1413: 2/69; Abulfutūh Rāzī, 1408: 5/66).

There are some views about the denotation of "a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth" in Interpretation Books:

Some believe it means paradise that its breadth is as seven heavens and seven earths when they joined together. Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī has mentioned this meaning, quoted from Ibn Abbas, Jabā'ī, Hasan Basrī and Balkhī. (Ṭūsī, n.d: 2/591; Ṭabarsī, 1372: 2/836).

Further to these two interpretations, this view has been proposed in Ruz Al-Jinān (Abulfutūh Rāzī, 1408: 5/67), Jamī'a Al-Bayān (Ṭabārī, 1412: 4.6), Rūh Al-Ma'aānī (Ālūsī, 1415: 2/271), and Al-Kashshāf (Zimakhsharī, 1407: 1/415).

Suyūṭī has said this signification in his book, quoted from Sa'īd ibn Jabīr. He cites a report from which Ibn Abbas asks the meaning of this part of the verse from one of the People of the Book. He was referring to Moses Afsār, said that the extent of this paradise is as much as seven heavens and seven earths, when they come together like pieces of cloth. (Suyūṭī, 1404: 2/7).

The problem with this view is that in verse unlike the term "Heavens", the word "Land" is singular, so suggesting, "the seven earths" meaning is not correct.

The second comment attributed to Abumuslim Isfahani, according to which the meaning of this phrase is the paradise that its price is as much as all the heavens and the earth value (Ṭabārī, 1372: 2/836). Although Ṭabārī has uttered it is mellifluous, but it is not without difficulty and rejected it lastly (Ṭabārī, 1412: 4/592).

The third view considers "breadth" not in the metaphorical meaning, length, but as extent (Ṭabārī, 1372: 2/836). Ṭabāṭabāī in Al-Mizan writes: "And He said that: "a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth", it does not indicate that the breadth is versus the length, but it means its extent (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 4/20). Ibn Hātham refers to this meaning in his interpretation (Ibn Hātham, 1423: 128), moreover; in other interpretation this opinion verified (Maḥalī, Suyūṭī, 1416: 70; Zimakhsharī, 1407: 1/415; Shaybānī, 1413: 2.70; Rāzī, 1420: 9/366).

On this basis, according to the views of interpreters in this verse, Allah commanded the believers overtaking to the paradise in that its extent is the seven heavens and the earth breadth. Nevertheless it is the question: when does this paradise realize, and when do the heavens and the earth breadth become the paradise.

There is nothing about this paradise characteristic and its time occurrence in the interpretation books. Only, Ibn Arabi believing "Unity of Divine Acts" is specific to World of Mulk – i.e. the heavens and the earth breadth in which this paradise takes place in it- calls this Paradise as "Paradise of Acts" in his interpretation book (Ibn Arabi, 1422: 1/122).

Among Ahlul-Bayt (as) Hadith References reached to us, only a narrative about the quality of the paradise and its time occurrence exists. According to this saying, which has not been much noticed among interpreters, a person asked Imam Sadiq (as) about this Paradise, and he answered: "when they (the heaven and the earth) were put as such" and opened his hands and put one over the other one (Feiz Kāshānī, 1415: 1/380).

3 The time occurrence of mentioned Paradise in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān

Since the interpretations does not refer to the position and the time occurrence in "a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth", it can be concluded based on interpreters perspective that the expressed paradise in this verse is the ultimate paradise after the resurrection, when good people will enter afterwards blowing the trumpet and passing Last Judgment stations.

The rest of this article explores this theory, and we will show that Jannat in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān could not be the paradise after the resurrection. In addition, two other likely choices about this garden position i.e. Purgatory Heavens and Paradise Gardens, in which right people go there after death (Ṭabāṭabāī: 1/139) shall be reviewed, and we shall indicate this paradise is not matched with these two possibilities. Subsequently, we examine the theory discussed in this article.

3.1 Non-compliance with the paradise after the resurrection
Earlier, the similarities between the two incidents, the advent of Imam Mahdi (PBUH) and the establishment of Judgment noted. But there is a fundamental difference between these two events and verses relating to them. Reflection on Mahdavi verses and the advent makes it clear that the emergence of Imam Mahdi will coincide with beginning changes in the cosmic system (Hakīmī, 1379: 345). Events such as large fire rising from the east (Nu'amanī, 1397: 267; Majlisī, 1403: 52/240), speaking of stone, and the emergence of Angels in the line of Imam Mahdi (PBUH) (Ḥillī, 1421: 446), sunrise from the west (Ibn Babiveih, 1362, 2/431; Ṭabarsī, 1390: 455), and change in animals and nature style (Ibn peacock, 1416: 173; Qomi, 1404: 2/253). Despite these changing the rules, the heavens and the earth will not collapse and will remain in the days of Imam Mahdi (as). Nonetheless the verses and sayings that have described the events before the resurrection implies the abolition of the heavens and the earth system on the verge of establishing Resurrection.

Several verses of the holy Quran points to the abolition of the heavens and the earth system on the verge of establishing Resurrection:

3.1.1 The First Verse

"We have not created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, save with the truth and a stated term, but the unbelievers are turning away from that they were warned of" (Al-AḤqāf; 3)

According to this verse, God created the heavens and the earth in not eternal manner but decided a deadline for it that when it comes to an end, the heavens and the earth will be destroyed. Interpreters have uttered this term is Day of Judgment.

3.1.2 The Second Verse

On the day when the earth will be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens) also will be changed (and they will come forth unto Allah, the One, the Almighty, (Ibrāhim; 48).

Ṭaḥṭabāḥī has said this verse refers to the establishment of Last Judgment, considering Al in both word "earth" and "heavens" is specific, and "earth" and "heavens" are conjunction to each other, so translated it "the day the earth turns to no earth and the heavens into no heavens" (Ṭaḥṭabāḥī, 1417: 12/88)

3.1.3 The Third Verse

Upon the day that heaven is split asunder with the clouds and the angels arose down in majesty. (Al-Furqān; 52)

Describing the last judgment, this verse speaks about split and destruction of the heaven and sending down angels (Ṭaḥṭabāḥī, 1417: 15/202). Ṭabarsī quotes Ibn Abbas described the splitting of the sky to the seven heavens (Ṭabarsī, 1372: 7/263).

Moreover, destruction of the heavens, the stars, the earth, and the moon on the eve of Day of Judgment has been discussed in many Quranic verses.

Based on what have been attained from traditions, the extent of Paradise after the resurrection is much greater than the seven heavens and the earth. Accordingly, "Paradise" in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān that extends across the heavens and the earth is not the heaven after the resurrection, and its realization will be before the establishment of Judgment and in the world.

3.2 Non-compliance with Purgatory Heavens

Purgatory Heavens versus the eternal paradise (Ṭaḥṭabāḥī, 1417: 1/139) is a paradise which ends until Judgment Day (Ṭaḥṭabāḥī, 1417: 19/31). Interpreters consider some mentioned Paradise in the Qur'an as Purgatory Heavens. For instance, Ṭabarsī in Majma'a Al-Bayān has taken "the Garden of Abode" as Purgatory Heavens (Ṭabarsī, 1372: 9/265).

But this possibility is not acceptable due to several reasons:

3.2.1 Unlike Purgatory Heavens, this paradise breadth extends to the earth in addition to the heavens.
3.2.2) Purgatory Heavens breadth is not as much as all the seven heavens size, and in addition to heaven space there is space for hell, where the wicked punish. (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 1/207). For example, Ṭabāṭabāī recognizes the 46th verse of Ghāfir as Purgatory Heavens relating to the Pharaoh (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 1.350), while this is the heaven comprises all the seven heavens.

3.2.3) Man after his own death shall enter the limbo and Purgatory Heavens (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 15/68). So if the purpose of the heaven in this verse is Purgatory Heavens, we must admit Allah has dictated people hastening to death.

3.3 Non-compliance with Paradise Gardens

In some Quranic verses, the word "Jannat" has been used for gardens on land. Nonetheless, this cannot be physical gardens on the ground because this paradise breadth can cover the heavens further to the earth.

3.4 Paradise of Mahdavi Land

Based on what have been proposed about Paradise in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān, whose breadth includes all the heavens and the earth, it will actualize before Day of Resurrection and in this world. Also, this paradise is not Purgatory Heavens that right people enter after their death. According to the divine command "Sāriʿū", the time occurrence of the mentioned Paradise will be in future. But with the rise of evil and intrigue before the advent of Imam Mahdi (PBUH), and the wars between the right and the wrong front after His advent, it is not possible to make it happen before the annihilation of the evil and the wrong by Imam Mahdi (AS) and His soldiers. Thus, the Paradise in the given verse is the one that will create by Imam Mahdi (AS) and His soldiers after the whole obliteration of the evil and the wrong. With the advent of Imam Mahdi (AS) and the illumination of God light on earth, the rules governing the heavens and the earth system will change to some extent that are not comparable with the previous conditions. The holy Qur'an assert it as hereafter section versus the world section.

Some proofs for what this article is meant for Paradise in the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān:

3.4.1 The First Verse

For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants (Al-Anbīā; 105)

This verse is about Mahdavi verses based on Shiites and Sunnis opinions (Tājirī Nasab, 1387: 10/110, Qandūzī, 1385: 3/243, Majlisī, 1407: 51/48). On the basis of tradition, those who inherit the earth will be Imam Mahdi (PBUH) and His companions at the end. (Bahrānī, 1374: 3/848; Ṭabarstī, 1372: 7/106; Qumī, 1404: 2/77). In a Imam Kadhim (as) saying, the earth inherited by Righteous servants of God - Imam Mahdi (PBUH) and His companions – is called the paradise of the earth (Astarābādī, 1409: 326). This Paradise has the heaven plus the earth that based on the 133th Verse of Āl-i 'Amrān is as breadth as the seven heavens.

3.4.2 The Second Verse

And they shall say, Praise belongs to God, who has been true in His promise to us, and has bequeathed upon us the earth, for us to make our dwelling wheresoever we will in Paradise How excellent is the wage of those that labour! (Zumar; 74)

This verse also speaks about inheriting of the earth. Interestingly, the earth is mentioned in this verse with the word Jannat that is consistent with the traditions explaining the 105th verse of Al-Anbīā. In tradition, exactly the phrase "Arz Al-Jannat" (Bahrānī, 1374: 4/735) is put forth, compatible with the 105th verse of Al-Anbīā. (Astarābādī, 1409: 326).

Ṭabāṭabāī with a view to the verse "Their will be the sequel of the (heavenly) Home", verified that the paradise in the 74th verse of Zumar is the end of this world (Ṭabāṭabāī, 1417: 17/298).
3.4.3 The Third Verse

And besides these two are two (other) gardens which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Both inclining to blackness (Arrahmnān; 62-64)

In some interpretive traditions, the term Jannat in the holy Quran, has interpreted into the paradise during Imam Mahdi (PBUH). In the 46th verse of Arrahmnān, Allah speaks about the two paradise that is for who fears the Lord. Then, in the 62th verse, refers to the two inferior Paradises in comparison with those two ones in the 46th verse: "And besides these two are two (other) gardens which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? Both inclining to blackness" (Arrahmnān; 62-64).

In the interpretive tradition has written these two paradise will realize in this world (Bahrānī, 1374: 5/243; Qumī, 1404: 2/346). Bahrānī quoted from Baṣa'ir Al-Darajāt a hadith in which Imam Sadiq (as) has explained some of the event after the advent of Imam Mahdi (PBUH). Then he said: "at this time, both of Paradise and its surroundings as long as God wills, will be held in the Mosque of Kufa" (Bahrānī, 1374: 1/448).

The phrase "... and its surroundings as long as God wills", referring to the extension of this paradise as far as God wills, showing the greatness of the heavens in Mahdavi Paradise, which can be as all the heaven's breadth considering the 133th verse of Āl-i 'Amrān. Under this narrative, it can be concluded that the intention of both Paradise in the lower ranks of the paradise after Judgment Day, is Heavenly space in the world after the advent.

Suyūtī also in the interpretation of "Al-dur Al-Manthūr fī Tafsir Al-Ma'aṯūr" quoted a hadith that signifies the Hereafter paradises are the raised and the transcendental paradise formed in this world and in the seven heavens. In general, traditions that describe the heavenly space after the advent of Imam Mahdi (as) such as emerging the blessings of heaven and the earth, revealing land mines and treasures, development of people wisdom, the destruction of bad guys, Justice, change in animals and nature style, Angels assistance, unity, harmony, and kindness among all people (Sāfī, n.d.: 486-472), could be seen in relation to the description of this paradise. The paradise, from which its earth inherited by Righteous Servants of God, and in front of the earth, is the heaven as great as the seven heaven breadth based on the 133th verse of Āl-i 'Amrān.

Conclusion

There is a confusion in Shiites and Sunnis Interpretation Books to decide the true example of one Quranic verse containing a prognostic description of sections ahead. Some tradition specified to the description of the pre and the post atmosphere of the Imam Mahdi (a.s) advent, attributed to the judgment owing to disappearance of the evidence reached in the traditions, and congruity in the upcoming sections.

Among the verses that delineate sections ahead, there are verses providing a picture of the heaven characteristic and the people of Paradise descriptions. Interpreters have counted four examples for "Jannat" in holy Quran: Paradise after the resurrection, Purgatory Heavens, Paradise Gardens, and Adam Garden. Contemplation on Quranic verses implies that the given "Jannat" is not compatible with the mentioned four examples.

"Jannat" mentioned the 133th verse of Āl-i 'Amrān that is as wide as the heavens and the earth in one hand, the realization of this Paradise before the fall of the heavens and the earth in other hand, besides other evidence in the verses and traditions drawing the world on the eve of the resurrection and the advent of Imam Mahdi (as), leads us to conclude that this paradise is after the advent of Imam Mahdi (as), and after the destruction of the wrong side of the world. In fact, the 133th verse of Āl-i 'Amrān has addressed a prognostic description of this world future.

With the advent of Imam Mahdi (as) and the illumination of God light on earth, the rules governing the heavens and the earth system will change to some extent that are not comparable with the previous conditions. The holy Qur'an assert it as hereafter section versus the world section. Quran knows the earth after the advent of Imam Mahdi (as) as a Paradise in the scope of the earth and the heaven. Accordingly, in addition to the four examples mentioned, Paradise of Mahdavi Land, should be applied as the fifth example of "paradise" in the Quran. Other traditions and verses can be presented to confirm this theory.

In other words, after the advent and the disappearance of evil and wrongs, the earth will inherit to Imam Mahdi (as) and His companions in which, according to their Righteous character revert it into a Paradise extending from the earth to the seven heavens.

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