

# **Satan, An Angel Or Not? A Grammatical Analysis Of Qur'an, 7:11**

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### Satan, An Angel Or Not? A Grammatical Analysis Of Qur'an, 7:11

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In the Islamic tradition, Satan was known to be a pious and obedient believer of God. During this phase we find in the Qur'an that he is referred to as إبليس (Iblis). His disobedience is what made him into شيطان (the devil)<sup>1</sup>, who is known to spread evil and misguide the believers. His disobedience began with him rejecting the command of Allah (swt), when He commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam (a). However, Satan refused as he considered himself to be superior in creation, since Adam was made of clay and Satan was made of fire.

This article will focus on Surah Al-A'raf, verse 11, considered to be 39th chapter in terms of revelation<sup>2</sup>. The verse states:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

***“And We have certainly created you, [O Mankind], and given you [human] form. Then We said to the angels, “Prostrate to Adam”; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He was not of those who prostrated.”(7: 11)***

Another verse of the similar content states,

فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى أَنْ يَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ

***“So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together, Not so (except) Iblis: he refused to be among those who prostrated themselves.”(15:30-31)***

These verses have been the cause of many discussions and debates among theologians and scholars of the Arabic language on whether Satan himself is from the angels himself or separate from them. Before entering this discussion, it is important to consider the grammatical analysis and the preliminaries for understanding this verse which consequently shapes the essence of this discussion and allows us to see the importance of each word and its impact within Arabic grammar.

Within the Qur'an we find the constant usage of the exceptive particle الّا (illa)<sup>3</sup> known as حرف الاستثناء which necessitates two nouns, the exception مستثنى (mustathna) and the antecedent of the exception مستثنى منه (mustathna minh)<sup>4</sup>. Consider the following example: The people came to me, except for Zayd. In this sentence, “The people” is the antecedent of the exception “Zayd”, i.e., the noun from which the exception is made. “Except” is the exceptive particle and “Zayd” is the noun which is excepted i.e. the

noun succeeding the exceptive particle. To understand the same sentence within Arabic grammar, consider the following:

جائني القوم الا زيداً

(Verb and the object) – جائني: فعل و مفعول – Came to me

(The antecedent of the excepted) – القوم: منه مستثنى – The People

(The exceptive particle) – حرف الاستثناء: الا – Except (for)

(The excepted/exception) – زيداً: مستثنى – Zayd<sup>5</sup>

Typically the word that comes after the exceptive particle is the exception, in which the excepted has a relationship with the antecedent of the exception<sup>6</sup>. The relationship between the exception and the antecedent of the exception are divided into 3:

1 a) متصل: In which the excepted noun is part of the antecedent of the excepted. For example:

جائني القوم الا زيداً

Zayd is part of the people, hence when “the people” are mentioned “Zayd” is included amongst them

b) منقطع: In which the excepted noun is not part of the antecedent of the excepted. For example:

جائني القوم الا حماراً

The people came to me except the donkey. The donkey is not part of the people, as القوم is comprised of humans, not donkeys.

2 a) موجبة: In which the relationship between the excepted noun and the antecedent of the excepted is affirmative/positive. For example:

جائني القوم الا زيداً

b) سالبة: In which the relationship between the excepted and the antecedent of the excepted is negative. For example:

ما جائني القوم الا زيداً

The people did not come to me except for Zayd<sup>7</sup>. ما being the particle of negation.

3 a) تام: In which the antecedent of the excepted is mentioned in the sentence. For example:

جائني القوم الا زيدا

القوم being the antecedent of the excepted, which is mentioned in the sentence.

b) مفرغ: In which the antecedent of the excepted is not For example [8](#):

جائني الا زيد

Zayd will be considered the فاعل (doer) [9](#) in this case, since the rules of مستثنى will no longer apply. Considering the principles mentioned above, we are able to apply them on the verse concerning our topic:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

***Surely We created you, then shaped you, then said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” so they all did—but not (except) Iblis who refused to prostrate with the others. (7: 11)***

مَلَائِكَةً: مستثنى منه

الْأ: حرف الاستثنا

إِبْلِيسَ: مستثنى

In this verse, we see that “angels” is the antecedent of the excepted, while “but not/except” is the exceptive particle and “Iblis” is the exception. In terms of the relationship between the antecedent of the excepted and the excepted, this verse is موجبة (affirmative/positive), and تام (the antecedent of the excepted in mentioned). However, the difference of opinion is regarding the relationship between the antecedent of the excepted, in this case, angels, and whether the excepted, being Iblis is متصل or منقطع. If one interprets this relationship to be متصل, this would infer that Iblis is part of the angels and considered to be one as well, on the contrary, if one considers the relationship to be منقطع, it would mean that Iblis is not part of the angels, rather a Jinn.

The popular view amongst the scholars regarding this discussion, is that Iblis cannot be considered to part of the angels because he was created from a different genus [10](#). Therefore the relationship between the antecedent of the excepted and the excepted is الاستثناء المنقطع. This view is supported by verse 50 in Surah Al-Kahf, being the 69th chapter in terms of revelation [11](#).

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ

***And when We said to the angels: “Prostrate before Adam,” so they all did but not (except) Iblis who was one of the Jinn, but he rebelled against the command of his Lord.”(18:50)***

Consequently, to further prove Iblis was created from a different genus, verse 12 of Surah Al-A'raf states:

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أُمِرْتُكَ ۖ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ

***“[Allah] asked, “What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?” He replied, “I am better than he is: You created me from fire and him (Adam) from clay.”(7: 12)***

In this case, Iblis made an analogy proposing that, that which is greater cannot prostrate to that which is less in status, inferring that fire is greater than clay. However, Satan had made a mistake because God's commandment of prostrating to Adam indicates that clay could be considered to be greater than fire, as this is concordant with God's ultimate knowledge.[12](#)

Those who take the position that the relationship between the antecedent of the excepted and the excepted is متصل, justify their claim by arguing that if Iblis was not part of the angels, then the command of God to prostrate to Adam would not apply to Iblis, however this is not the case when analyzing the verse.[13](#) “Based on verse 30 of Surah Al-Baqarah[14](#), it is proven that Iblis and all the angels reached a status considered to be elevated and holy. Thus the command that was given by God (to prostrate to Adam), was not directed to individuals one by one who had reached this status, rather it was directed to them as a whole.”[15](#) This infers that Iblis was considered from the angels and possessed the same status as them, though later on, he rebelled against God and fell from his elevated status.

Sayyid Baqir al-Hakim also argues although Iblis is mentioned in the Qur'an to be from the Jinn, it is possible that the Qur'an referring to this point can also mean that some of the angels can be described as Jinn. He concludes that Iblis is from the angels by citing the following argument:

وذلك لان وصف القرآن الكريم لإبليس بأنه من الجن يمكن أن يكون من ناحية أن بعض الملائكة يوصف بأنه جن، إن لم يكن هذا الوصف عاما لهم، لان الجن مأخوذ من الخفاء والستر، والملائكة مستورون عن عوالمنا ومشاهدنا

“This is because it is possible that the Qur'an's reference to Iblis as being from the Jinn could be due to the fact that some of the angels can also be described as Jinn, if not all of them, this is because the root of the word – Jinn – means hidden, and the angels are hidden from our world as we cannot see them![16](#). Despite the differences in opinions regarding this matter, this discussion vitalizes the importance and application of Arabic grammar within the Islamic sciences, more so in Tafsir and Qur'anic sciences. From this, one is able to understand how each and every word within Arabic grammar has the potential to affect the entire meaning of a sentence and in this particular discussion, a whole concept.

1. Root letters: شطن, which means to be alienated or to go into different directions. A synonym for تباعد . al- Isfahani, Raghib Mufradat alfaadh al-Qur'an. p. 404.
2. Ma'rifat, Muhammad Hadi Tamhid fi Ulum al Qur'an . v.1 p. 128
3. Other exceptive particles include, خلا, عدا, حاش, سوى, غير.
4. This discussion appears in the books of Arabic Grammar under the section of the accusative case – منصوب
5. There is a difference of opinion on what the governor (عامل) for the vowel of مستثنى is i.e. what makes it the accusative case. Refer to al-Anbari, al-Insaf fi mas'ail al-khilaf bayn al- Nahwiyeen; al- Basriyeen wa al- Kufiyeen p. 212.
6. In the case where it is obligatory for the مستثنى to be the accusative case, the مستثنى can precede the منه مستثنى.
7. In this case (with the condition of the sentence being تام) there is a difference of opinion; if the مستثنى is منقطع, the Ahl al-Hijaz only allowed the مستثنى to be منصوب while the Bani Tamim allowed it to be both منصوب or ا بدل. If treated as a بدل, its vowel will be according to its grammatical position in the sentence. Refer to Abdul-Hamid, Muhammad Muhi al-Deen, Sharh Qatr al-Nida, wa bal il- sada. p. 304.
8. In the case of مفرغ (muffaragh), the rules of الاستثناء will not apply since the مستثنى منه is not mentioned. Thus the sentence will be treated according to the grammatical position of each word in the sentence based on word governance.
9. The standard vowel for the فاعل is the nominative case (مرفوع).
10. جنس
11. Ma'rifat, Hadi Tamhid fi Ulum al Qur'an. v.1 p. 129.
12. Tabrasi, Abu Ali Fadhl ibn Hassan Majma ul- Bayan fi Tafsir al- Qur'an. v.4, p.190.
13. Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussayn. Tafsir al-Mizan. v.8 p.29.
14. The verse is as following:  
وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً ۖ قَالُوْۤا اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗ قَالَ اِنِّىْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a khalif, they said: What! Wilt Thou place in it such as shall make mischief in it and shed blood, and we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness? He said: Surely I know what you do not know. (2:30)

15. Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussayn. Tafsir al-Mizan. v.8 p.30.
16. al-Hakim, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir. Ulum al Qur'an p.471.

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