

CHAPTER 4

TRANSCENDENT GOD IN OLD TESTAMENT AND QUR'AN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Glaser (1997:4) presents the problem of studying the Qur'an and the Bible in respect to the movement of seeing literary relationships between the Scriptures, begun by Waldman in 1986. "This is not an easy exercise, because the Qur'anic stories are not usually told in one place. In fact, they are seldom told as stories: it is more accurate to say that they are referred to as part of the Qur'anic discourse. Thus, for example, the Qur'anic Abraham story has to be pieced together from references in 15 different surahs."

Perhaps the problem of the various locations of the biblical stories in the Qur'an is due to the fact that "the Prophet felt that his sources were lacking in spiritual interpretation, and so remolded them in places" (MacDonald 1956:224). Therefore, the biblical story is written in a sporadic pattern within all aspects of the Qur'an. Others insist that "the Qur'an was intended as a sermonic book, written in a rhetorical, didactic style, and that it is false to attempt to find modern scientific inventions mentioned in it" (Nolin 1964:6). This means that whenever the occasion of the sermon took place, biblical accounts were freely used for the purpose of the above-mentioned sermon. Therefore the Qur'an was not indented to follow the narrative construction found in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Consequently,

interpretation of the biblical narrative in the Qur'an is inevitably dependent upon the Bible to complete the story presented in the Qur'an.

Although it is essential to follow one's interest in the interpretation of Scriptures and apply the result to their own contextual situation, there are problems of interpretation from both Qur'anic and biblical scholars in spite of several studies made. Glaser (1997:4) says:

There have therefore been several comparative literary studies (Abdel Haleem 1990; Mir 1986; Rendsburg 1988; Waldman 1986). All these show that, although the stories are recognizably about the same people and the same events, they are used so differently that they tell very different stories about characters and motivations and therefore present different views of God and humanity.

The above mentioned problem routinely occurs in the corresponding stories between the Qur'an and the Bible, resulting in the omission of biblical accounts in the Qur'an. This may be due to the nature of the Qur'an as sermonic book, or the result of a redactor who removed some of the personal accounts of scandalous events of biblical figures due to the Muslim assumption of the innocence of prophets. Glaser (1997:4-5) confirms:

All prophets are innocent....As Mohammad is the seal of the prophets, all previous prophets brought the same essential message as he did....The Qur'anic uses of the Genesis stories reflect these assumptions. Such scandalous events as Noah's drunkenness and Abraham's lies are omitted, and each prophet has some similarities to Mohammad.

Furthermore, Islam predetermines that should anything differ in the Qur'an and the Bible, it is because of the Bible being interpolated or corrupted by human involvement in the writing of the Scripture. Therefore, "It is not surprising that Muslims read the Bible on the basis of their own assumptions: in fact, it is to be expected" (Glaser 1997:7). For Christian scholars who study the Qur'an and Qur'anic materials, Glaser (1997:7) suggests two considerations that lead to provoking questions, which produce new insights into both Scriptures. First, Islamic comments can challenge consideration of how Christians' readings are determined by their own sets of assumption. Secondly, reading the biblical text alongside parallel Qur'anic material and commentary can bring more subtle challenges for interpretation. Then, Glaser suggests that Christians listen to the Islamic comments and enter into dialogue with them over the Christian's Scripture and their reading of it.

With the above conjectural considerations this chapter focuses on the exegetical and comparative studies of God's relation to his subjects limited to Adam, Abraham, and Moses in the Qur'an and the Bible. The focus of the investigation of the corresponding passages and episodes between the Old Testament and the Qur'an is to recognize the characteristic appearance of God's transcendence as revealed in the text. The general underlying principle of God's relationship with his subjects is that the God of the Qur'an is revealed as an absolutely transcendent God who does not permit the kind of personal relationship seen in the Bible. The Bible expresses both transcendence and immanence in God's relationship with the people of Israel including Adam, Abraham, and Moses.

4.2 TRANSCENDENT GOD AND ADAM

4.2.1 Introduction

There is extensive evidence of similarities in the creation story between the Qur'an and the Bible. Both the Qur'an and the Bible state that God's creation took six days.³⁹ The stories of the Garden, Adam, and the Fall are identical and important in both Scriptures as they establish the inception of God's relationship with his creation. The basic outline of the stories is identical in both Scriptures, yet there are some critical differences that may define different aspects of God's relationship with his creation.

The general expression of man's creation such as in Surah 38:71-72 and 15:28-29 refer to all humankind, not to Adam alone (Ali [1946] 1996:7).⁴⁰

Surah 38:71-72 ⁷¹Behold thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from clay: ⁷²'When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit fall ye down in obeisance unto him.

Surah 15:28-29 ²⁸Behold! thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from sounding clay from mud moulded into shape; ²⁹'When I

³⁹ The Qur'an indicates the creation takes six days in Surah 7:54; 32:4; 57:4. In Surah 41:9, 10, 12 the creation took eight days in total.

⁴⁰ As both the Qur'an (S 15:28-29) and the Bible (Gn 1:26) use the word "man" to indicate humankind, *the word "man" is interchangeably used with humankind in this thesis.*

have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit
fall ye down in obeisance unto him.’

These accounts of Surah 38 and 15 correspond to the biblical account of Genesis 2:7 where it says: “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” However, the approach to the creation story of Adam in Islam is somewhat confusing. For example, Nolin (1964:7) upholds a compromising interpretation by promoting the idea that a factual story does not need to exclude the symbolic at the same, or vice versa. He especially rejects the traditionally literal interpretation of Adam’s creation from mud (*min tin*, S 7:12; 17:61; 38:71, 76) by saying that no Muslim should ever be obligated to believe it, because it means that Adam’s material substance is of the earth. The reason behind his argument is based on the purpose of the Qur’an, being primarily teaching material, and the explanation of man’s nature and the origin of the evil forces within it.

The purpose of man’s creation or his nature seems to agree between the Qur’an and the Bible. In the Qur’an, the purpose is clearly indicated as a deputy-ruler over the earth for Surah 2:30 declares: “Behold thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’” Genesis 1:26 states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” According to the Scriptures, man’s ruling over the earth seems to be a primary purpose for God’s creation of man.

However, the relationship between God and man (Adam and Eve) in the creation and the Garden of Eden seems to hold an important position in the understanding of God’s

transcendence in the Qur'an and the Bible. This relationship could affect the remainder of God's relationship revealed in the Qur'an and the Bible, as the account of Adam occurred in the primal place of God's entire self-revelation to his creation. Specifically, Adam's role in the creation process, the location of the Garden and its purpose, and the reaction of God reflected in the Fall of Man may provide some insight into God's transcendence and immanence in respect to his spatial revelation as well as man's ability to transcend over creation.

4.2.2 Adam and the creation

God displays his mighty power over his creation by causing it to come into existence. The power of creation has established God's transcendent state over creation. The creation of the first man, Adam, is considered an irrefutable example of God's creational power. Both the Qur'an and the Bible indicate that God has a purpose in the creation of man.

The Qur'an states the purpose of man as: 'I will create a vicegerent [*khalefah*] on earth' (S 2:30). The Arabic word *khalefah* is derived from the verb *khalafa* (he succeeded), thus meaning "successor." In this verse, the word is used as an allegory to denote man's rightful supremacy on earth. Furthermore, the word *khalefah* is written in English as "Caliph" and used to indicate a title given to the successor of Mohammad, who is vested with absolute authority in all matters of state, both civil and religious (Huges 1998:263). This implies that "Man is, thus, not the master; he is only His deputy and does not possess any powers of his own except those which are delegated to him by the real Master" (Maududi 1977:58). In other words, the task of the *khalefah* is to manage God's world on God's behalf. This is the *'ibādah* or "service of God" which is God's purpose of creation of man. "That is why man

was honoured as the best of creation and angels were asked to lie prostrate before him” (Rahman 1967:10).

Similarly, the Bible reports that man is to look over God’s creation, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Gn 1:26). The word “rule over (רָדָה)” is generally limited to human rather than divine dominion (White 1980:833). In the Old Testament, there are other purposes of man besides ruling over God’s creation (Gn 1:26). They are “to praise,” “worship,” and “obey God” (Is 43:21; Gn 2:15). The purpose written in Genesis 2:15 will be discussed in the later part of this chapter (4.2.3.2).

Both the Qur’an and the Bible indicate that man is to exercise self-dominion within the limit of God’s approval. The fact, as seen in the Qur’an and the Bible, that man is to look after the creation of God displays the superior power of man over all other creation. It indicates God’s superior power over man as he imparts authority to rule over his creation. This upward transcending movement, from the creation to man and man to God, illustrates God’s absolute transcendence over his creation.

However, if Adam somehow would have participated in the process of God’s creation, then God would be seen as less transcendent from man than any other creation, since man has demonstrated the power of creation, which is limited to God. As God demonstrates his absolute transcendent state through his creation of the world, there would be a lesser degree of transcendence of God compared to man if Adam’s participation in the creation process is proved.

In Genesis 1, every time God finished the creation according to the daily order, he completed the process by conferring its name. Therefore, the naming process is the final stage of the creation (Westermann [1974] 1984:87). However, on the sixth day, after the creation of animals, God left the naming process to man (Gn 2). What, therefore, would be the implication of Adam giving names to the animals? Both the Qur'an and the Bible account for the naming of animals:

Genesis 2:19-20 ¹⁹And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. ²⁰And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found.

Surah 2:31-33 ³¹And He [Allah] taught Adam the nature [name] of all things; then He placed them before the angels and said: "Tell Me the nature of these if ye are right." ³²They said: "Glory to Thee of knowledge we have none save that Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom." ³³He said: "O Adam! tell them their natures." When he had told them Allah said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?"

In the Qur'anic account, God taught Adam the names of the animals (*kull –ha thumma*, "all things"), and Adam recited them before the angels (S 2:31-33). Then God commanded the angels to bow down with respect to Adam for reciting the names perfectly. All the angels

bowed down as God commanded, but *Iblis* (Satan) refused to bow down to Adam in his arrogance (S 2:34).⁴¹

The words used in the Qur’anic account of naming are “taught” (*callama*) and “told” (*qaala*). The Arabic word *qaala* is used to convey a message from one to another in the Qur’an. The major use of this word is as an imperative in directive form. For example, “Say [*qul*]: ‘Obey Allah and His Apostle’” (S 3:32). It is never used with the authority of the speaker. Conversely the word *callama* is exclusively used to indicate God’s teaching in the sense of imparting knowledge to his followers (S 2:239, 251; 12:37; 53:5; 55:4; 96:4, 5). God imparted the names to Adam and Adam simply recited the names of the animals perfectly. Therefore, the Qur’anic account of naming the animals and birds is a demonstration of man’s superior position over all creatures, including the angels (S 2:34). At the same time, it is “demonstrating God’s power and knowledge, not Adam’s” (Timm 1990:48). This would qualify man as a vicegerent (*khalefah*) on earth; one who has rightful supremacy on earth (S 2:30).

Furthermore, Islam treats the naming account with reference to the functional base of the name. Rahman (1979:11) states: “Now, ‘naming’ things implies the capacity to discover the properties of things, their interrelations and law of behaviour. When I call something a stone, a tree or electron, I know something about its behaviour, am able to find out more about it and to predict it.” He continues: “That is to say, man is distinguished from the rest of the

⁴¹ The theory of fallen angels is not accepted in Muslim theology (Ali 1989:25). However, the context shows that Satan was in the company of the angels (S 2:34). Also, Surah 18:50 says Satan was in the company of angels who are invisible (*al-jinn*). Muslims consider Satan as Jinns (*al-jinn*), a spirit or invisible force separate from the angels due to the belief in the perfection of God’s creation, which denies the fallen angels.

creation through his creative, scientific knowledge of things....” Rahman’s statement would qualify man to be a vicegerent as man has a distinguished and superior functional power over all creation. Furthermore, the teaching of the names by God means “the bestowal of the ability to perceive and comprehend the scientific truths inherent in the world” (Nūsair 1985:155). This is due to the fact that the name of thing is its symbol in a defined, conceptual form.

The biblical account is significantly different from the Qur'an. After God’s creation, Adam was to name all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air (Gn 2:19-20). It is Adam’s first act of dominion over creation, as God had commanded man to take dominion (1:28). The man had demonstrated his own power in naming God’s creation. By giving all the beasts and the birds names Adam proved himself their lord (Keil & Delitzsch [1891] 2002:55).

In the Bible, the naming process seems to create ownership of objects or change the nature of the object (Von Rad [1961] 1972:53, 83). “The Bible also illustrates the significance and power associated with certain names and with the act of naming” (Pike 1985:683). Moreover, the naming privilege is not limited to God alone but also to man. First, as we have already seen, as Genesis 1:5, 8, and 10 unfold, God named his creation in the stages of forming it. God’s creation activity can be divided into two major stages: as “days of forming” when God made foundational substances (light, water, land), and the “days of filling” when God filled the foundational substances with lights, moving creatures, birds, animals and man. God only named (called, קָרָא) his creation in “days of forming.” The naming of God’s creation is followed by Adam’s naming of the animals, the birds, and the woman (Gn 2:19-20, 23). After Adam named the woman (Gn 2:23), God named both man and woman as “man” (Gn 5:2). Furthermore, a person’s name is changed by God to indicate a different character or nature of

the person, such as Abram (father of elevation) to Abraham (father of a multitude, Gn 17:5) and Jacob (supplanter, or holding the heel) to Israel (soldier of or contender with God, Gn 35:10).⁴² When man gives a new name to another person, it usually indicates ownership through submission, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar naming Daniel “Belteshazzar”, Pharaoh naming Joseph “Zaphenath-Paneah” and many others (Gn 41:45; 2 Ki 23:34 ; 24:17; Da 1:7). Furthermore, God expressed his ownership over Moses when he said “I know you by name” (Ex 33:12).

In the biblical account of the naming of the animals and birds (Gn 2:19-20), there are three possible interpretations. First, both the introduction and conclusion of the context show that the process of naming was part of a search for a mate for Adam. After finishing creation God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden (Gn 2:15) and gave instructions for managing the Garden (Gn 2:16-17). Then God declared: “I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gn 2:18). Immediately God brought all living creatures and paraded them before Adam (Gn 2:19). However, the context concludes by finding “no suitable helper” for Adam (Gn 2:20). After failing to find a mate for Adam, God proceeds to the creation of woman from Adam (Gn 2:21-25).

In Genesis 2:18, the Hebrew word אֶעֱשֶׂה (I will make) used to indicate God’s desire for creating Adam’s helper supports the naming process as a notion of finding a mate. The root of the word אֶעֱשֶׂה is עָשָׂה, which has the basic meaning of “do” or “make.” In the creation account of Genesis the words עָשָׂה and בָּרָא (shape, create) are used interchangeably to

⁴² The definitions of the names are derived from the Hebrew words following the *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* (2003) entries.

indicate God’s creational act. However, the word בָּרָא carries the thought of the initiation of the action involved. “It always connotes what only God can do and frequently emphasises the absolute newness of the object created” (McComiskey 1980:701). On the other hand, the word עָשָׂה is much broader in scope, connoting primarily the fashioning of the object with little concern for special nuances (McComiskey 1980:701).

Both words, בָּרָא and עָשָׂה, appear together in Genesis 2:3 as: “And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work [מְלֵאכָתוֹ] of creating [בָּרָא] that he had done [לַעֲשׂוֹת].” Wenham (1987:36) comments on this unusual phrase (cf. Gn 2:2): “The combination of the verb בָּרָא ‘to create’ and עָשָׂה ‘to make’ covers all of God’s creative activity in the six days, reminding the reader of all that has been achieved.” Bowie (1952:489) agrees with Wenham’s view by saying the phrase is “the unnecessary repetition of God; probably an explanatory gloss on work.”

However, the “infinitive with ל is very often used **after a verb** to express an action which gives more details about or explains the preceding action” (Joüon 1993:437). Accordingly Joüon translates Genesis 2:3 as a gerund: “*He ceased all his work which God had created by doing.*” This verse (Gn 2:3) concludes the entire process of God’s creation as “from his work” (מְלֵאכָתוֹ). As Joüon translates, the two Hebrew words explain what God’s work is. The word בָּרָא refers the main work of God which is his creation, and the word עָשָׂה completed the creation by taking action of the work. Conclusively, the word בָּרָא indicates “create something out of nothing” while the word עָשָׂה refers to “creating something from which already exists.” For example, in Genesis 1:16, God made (עָשָׂה) two great lights out of “light” which were created previously in Genesis 1:3. Therefore the word עָשָׂה in Genesis 2:18 indicates that God would want to find and adopt one of the creatures and fashion it into

Adam's helper. If God wanted to create a completely new creature suitable to be Adam's helper, he would have used the word **בָּרָא** instead of **עָשָׂה**. This is further supported by the following verse 22, "Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Gn 2:22). In this verse the word for made is not **בָּרָא** nor **עָשָׂה** but **בָּנָה** (to build). This word is a synonym to **עָשָׂה** with the nuance of "rebuild." It "introduces us to the realm of craftsmanship where material products are made out of different kinds of material" (Wagner 1975:167). God is building a woman out of man which he already created (**בָּרָא**) in Genesis 1:27.

Zlotowitz (1980:105) supports the first interpretation and brings out another interpretation of Genesis 2:19-20. He says, "God brought the animals to man for a double purpose: to have man name the animals and thus establish his lordship over them; and to satisfy man that he could not hope to find from among them a suitable companion—to serve the dual function of helping him physically and spiritually, and at the same time be his intellectually equal." The delineation Zlotowitz makes in establishing man's lordship over animals has valuable argumentation in reference to God's statement in Genesis 1:26-28.

In the creation narrative, only the man has been given dominion in God's creation (Gn 1:26-28). The dominion is expressly declared to be over all other living creatures in the sky, sea, and land. The command of domination over creatures was repeated—once before the creation of man (v. 26) and after the creation of man (v. 28)—to emphasise God's intention in man's creation. Moreover, after God placed man in the Garden (Gn 2:15), the duty of man was to name all living animals and birds (Gn 2:19). The word used to indicate dominion of man is **רָדָה** (rule over) in verse 26 and 28. The root of the word **רָדָה** is related to the Akkadian word

radu, which means “tread” as in Joel 4:13 [Eng. 3:13].⁴³ It is generally limited to human rather than divine dominion (White 1980:833). Human dominion over creation is confirmed by God’s final commission to man in verse 28, “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground*” [Italics mine]. The five imperatives in this verse, as indicated in italics, are direct imperatives. Unlike indirect volitive which express the notion of purpose or consecution (Jouön 1993:381), these words express independent command or permission from God to emphasise the rule of man over God’s creation. God’s entrusting man with dominion over all other creatures is further confirmed in the New Testament: “In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him” (Heb 2:8; cf Ps 8:4-6).

However, naming the animals and the birds is more than “ruling” over creation. In Genesis 2:19-20, the word קָרָא (called) is used to indicate that Adam gave names to the animals and the birds. The word קָרָא first appears in Genesis 1:5 highlighting ownership or God’s dominion over all creation when he named (called, קָרָא) the light “day.” Hamilton (1990:12) relates these as, “For to confer a name (*qaral*^e) is to speak from a position of authority and sovereignty.” Furthermore, in an ancient view of names, “The Hebrew did not perceive the name as incidental, but as a given essential” (Gunkel [1901] 1997:12). In Exodus 33:12 and 17, the Lord knows Moses by name. Hannah (1985:157) interprets it as Moses belonging to God. Furthermore, Isaiah 43:1 implies that “by name” means owned by the creator: “But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.’”

⁴³ The Hebrew numeration of 4:13 corresponds to 3:13 in English; the number in brackets indicates the English numeration.

The king of Egypt, Pharaoh, changed the name of Joseph to Zaphenath-Paneah in order to indicate his ownership or dominion over Joseph even after the exaltation of Joseph (Gn 41:41-45). Isaiah 43:7 expresses that giving a name is having ownership of the creator. It reads “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created [בְּרָא] for my glory, whom I formed [יָצַר] and made [עָשָׂה].” Kaiser (1976:363) concludes well on the issue of giving names: “When one gives a name to another, he thereby establishes a relation of dominion or possession to him.”

The naming process may imply the exercise of finding a mate for Adam, establishing man’s lordship over the creation, and displaying man’s ownership of creation. If these implications are applied to the creation account, it is possible to interpret that man participated in God’s creation by exercising ownership and sovereignty over the creation, which confirms that man is created in the image of God, *imago Dei* (Gn 1:16). By conferring names that are essential aspects of animals and birds, man had demonstrated his superior status over the creation and completed the creation of God which God left for man to finish. Adam finally establishes *imago Dei* by naming his wife “woman” after God created her for him (Gn 2:23).

In summation, the Qur’anic narrative of Adam’s naming of the animals is viewed as God’s grant to man, that is, the capacity of knowledge that supersedes all creation including angels. The Qur’anic Adam received the names from God as a prophet receives God’s will while the biblical Adam did not know the names in advance but conferred the names by himself. Thus, the two accounts of the naming of animals suggest a different kind of authority and responsibility upon man. As Glaser (1997:11) suggests, the names of the animals, which presumably completes their creation in Genesis 1:24-25, suggests that the human being as an image of God is to work with God in his world. Adam is not only the *khalifah* who receives

the information that he needs in order to rule as God permits; his nature is to be creative and to rule in his own right, but in relationship with God.

Consequently man's actions in naming God's creation seems to imply something more than the simple practice of finding a mate for him or practicing dominion over the birds and the animals. By the power conferred by God, man took part in God's creative process by giving the essential natures to the animals and the birds. By naming creation, man transcends other creatures with authority and dominion, which belongs to God. Adam has completed God's creation and God's transcendent state is diminished by Adam's power of creation for he has proved his status of being in the image of God. However, Islam denies that man took part in creation. By denying man's participation in creation, the transcending attribute of God as creator remains with God alone. For that reason, the Qur'anic account simply indicates man's superior qualities of learning and memory over other creation, while the biblical Adam reflects the first example of *imago Dei*.

4.2.3 Spacio-relationship of God in the Garden

One of the arguments regarding the transcendence of God is to approach God's transcendent state through God's presence in space: the spacio-transcendence of God. In both Islam and Christianity, God can manifest himself in every place (Jr 23:23-24; Mt 18:20; Eph 1:23; S 2:115; 7:7; 43:84). However, can God physically manifest himself in space? The location of the Garden and the temptation of Satan⁴⁴ may shed some light on the spacio-transcendence

⁴⁴ In Gn 3, the serpent tempted the woman (Eve). However, the serpent is referred to "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan" (Rv 12:9; 20:2). In the Qur'an (S 2:36; 7:20), Satan is indicated as the one who tempted Adam and Eve.

of God, which reflects the spacio-relationship of God with his creation. Furthermore, God's relation to man in the Garden, displaying the possibility of God's dwelling with man, may diminish the transcendent state of God but increase God's immanent state with man. The Qur'an and the Bible describe the Garden in connection with Adam.

Genesis 2:8-15 ⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put [אָדָם] the man he had formed. ⁹And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put [אָדָם] him in the Garden of Eden to work it [לְעִבְדָהּ] and take care of it. [וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ]

Surah 2:35 [7:19] We said: "O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will but approach not this tree⁴⁵ or ye run into harm and transgression."

⁴⁵ Here the tree is identified as "the tree of life eternal" (S 20:120). However, Ali (1989:25) asserts that "The forbidden tree was not the tree of knowledge for man was given in that perfect state fuller knowledge than he has now (ii.31); it was the tree of Evil, which he was forbidden not only to eat of, but even to approach."

Surah 2:36 [7:24] Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden) and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: “Get ye down all (ye people) with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time.”

In the Qur’an, the passage in Surah 2:35-36 (cf 7:19, 24) is the only direct reference to Adam in the Garden. The account of Adam dwelling in the Garden corresponds to Genesis 2:15-17. Contrary to the biblical account, the Qur’anic account does not mention the name “Eden.” It simply indicates “the garden” (*al-jannah*). However, the name “Eden” (*cadn*) in Arabic occurs in the Qur’an eleven times (S 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8; 61:12; 98:8). Out of these, nine times are used (with plural form of *jannah*) as *jannaat cadn*, “the Gardens of Eden,” in the Malik translation and eleven times in the Pickthall translation.⁴⁶ Other translations, including the Ali translation, use words such as “the Gardens of Eternity” or “the Gardens of Perpetual Bliss.” This word “Eden” appears in the Sunni tradition of dividing heaven into eight stages (Mishkat 2:1 see also Shahih Al-Bukhari 4:479, 644; Figh-us-Sunnah 1:34; Sahih Muslim Hadith 104). This division of the heavens is based on the Qur’an, which frequently speaks of the creation of seven heavens by God (S 2:29; 17:44; 23:86; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15). However, “Tradition adds an eighth, since Heaven ought to have one division more than Hell, to show that Allah’s mercy exceeds His justice” (Thomas 1992:75). Hughes ([1885] 1998:449) lists the eight different heavens or paradises: (1) The Gardens of Eternity, *Jannatu ‘l-Khuld*, (2) The Dwelling of Peace, *Daaru’s-Salaam*, (3) The Dwelling which abideth, *Daaru ‘l-Qaraar*, (4) The Gardens of Eden, *Jannaatu ‘l-And*, (5) The Gardens of Refuge, *Jannaatu ‘l-Ma’waa*, (6) The Gardens of

⁴⁶ The Qur’an translation, Malik, Pickthall, Asad, Ali, Transliteration, and Hadith are extracted from the computer program, *The Alim* (Version 6.0).

Delight, *Jannaatu 'n-Naiim*, (7) *Illiyun*, and (8) The Gardens of Paradise, *Jannaatu 'l-Firdaus*.

By examining the eight stages or eight names for heaven, one could easily perceive that the name of each heaven is the description of itself. Furthermore, due to the plural (*jannaat*) use of the Garden (*janaah*), some scholars say that the residence of Adam, the Garden, is different from the Gardens of Eden (Hughes [1885] 1998:133). However, the sixty-nine uses of a singular heaven or garden (*jannah*) and sixty-seven usages of plural heavens or gardens (*janaat*) in the Qur'an are interchangeably used to describe heaven in the life to come, not the earthly garden.⁴⁷

Furthermore the descriptions in Surah 2:36 and 7:24 indicate that after the Fall, Adam fell to earth, and the earth became his dwelling place. The Qur'an reads, "Get ye down all (ye people) with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time." Therefore, according to the description of the Qur'an, the Garden of Eden is located in heaven, and it was Adam's first dwelling place. The Qur'an indicates that after the Fall, men are to go down to earth, which will be the dwelling place of people (S 2:36, 38; 7:24; 20:123). The purpose of man's creation spelled out in Surah 2:40, "I will create a vicegerent on earth," indicates that man is to live on earth, not in the heavenly Garden from which Adam was expelled due to the Fall. However, in Surah 2:35 God commands Adam to dwell (*uskun*) in the heavenly Garden. The Arabic word *uskun* is an imperative form from *sakana* (to inhabit, rest) with the nuance of permanent residence which

⁴⁷ The statistics are from the research tool in the computer software, *The Alim* (Version 6.0).

is cognate with Hebrew word שָׁכַן. Therefore, the question of the original dwelling place remains.

In the Genesis account, the Garden is physically located on earth where two known rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, were among the four rivers that flowed from the Garden (Gn 2:10-14). The Garden is the place where Adam named all the animals and the birds. Since neither the Qur'an nor the Bible attests to the presence of animals in heaven, the Garden must be on earth. Furthermore, the fact that God had formed animals and birds from the ground (of the earth, מִן־הָאָדָמָה) and brought them to Adam, shows that the biblical account of the Garden is the more logical explanation of its earthly location than the Qur'anic account (Gn 2:19). In addition, Lot's testimony of the whole plain of the Jordan in Genesis 13:10 shows that the Garden was physically located on earth. Genesis 13:10 indicates, "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD [Eden], like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah)." Finally, the presence of guards in the Garden of Eden prohibiting man to reach the 'Tree of Life' is a clear indication of the earthly location of the Garden. Genesis 3:24 states, "After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." The guards are not placed there as temporary but as permanent guards to protect the way, as God used the word שָׁכַן (to settle down permanently) to denote an English translation of "he placed."

After confirming that the biblical Garden of Eden is located on earth while the Qur'anic garden shows a heavenly location, it is logical to turn to the question of the kind of activity or purpose of Adam being in the Garden. Furthermore, the implication of the location of the Garden may provide a different insight into God's transcendence.

4.2.3.1 Activity in the Garden and the believers: Islamic view

Both Christians and Muslims agree that heaven is the dwelling place of God and believers (S 54:55; Mt 6:9). In the presence of the angels, including Satan, God commanded Adam to repeat the names of all things in Surah 2:31. The first incident of God's immanent presence in heaven with Adam and the angels has been testified to in the Qur'an. Furthermore, Surah 54:54-55 shows that believers are in the presence of God in heaven, "As to the Righteous [believers] they will be in the midst of Gardens and Rivers. In an Assembly of Truth in the Presence of a Sovereign Omnipotent [God]." However, this immanent presence of Adam and the believers is marred by the division and activities of believers in heaven described by the Qur'an.

The Qur'an frequently speaks of the creation of seven heavens by Allah (S 17:44; 23:86; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15). In those seven heavens there are different inhabitants: Adam in the first heaven, John the Baptist and Jesus in the second, Joseph in the third, Enoch in the fourth, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth, and Abraham in the seventh, where Allah is supposed to be present (Nehls and Eric 1996:13; Hughes [1885] 1998:170). Since Mohammad sits in heaven within two bow's lengths of the throne of Allah (S 53:9; Musk 1989:151), he is one of the closest to Allah in heaven, bestowed with the highest honour by Allah.⁴⁸ This confirms the contradiction in the Qur'an, namely that some prophets excel above others (S 2:253; 3:33), but all prophets are without distinction between them (S 2:136, 285; 3:84). Adam, being far away from God after returning to heaven, would not maintain the closeness of Surah 2:31-33, where he had the privilege of receiving honour before the angels.

⁴⁸ Two bow-lengths is interpreted as two bow-shots (200 to 300 yards) which would be a clearly visible distance (Ali 1989:1378), yet it is feasible distance to maintain God's ontological transcendent state.

The division and different inhabitants would indicate the fact that God has maintained selective manifestation before believers. Even within heaven God selectively maintains his spacio-transcendent state from the believers.

On the issue of the heavenly activities of the believers the Qur’anic account has no implications of the seven divisions of heaven. The believers are in “the Garden (*jannah*),” a more general and interchangeable term for heaven (S 4:124). For Muslims, heaven is essentially the same kind of life as the present time, except that it is eternal. The Qur’an speaks about heaven as a reward for being good servants of Allah (S 4:124, 9:22; 43:72; 52:19; 56:24). As a reward it is a place of fulfilling material comfort and sensual pleasure, which were limited while in this age.

For Muslims, heaven is a green garden, eternal home, and lofty mansion with rivers flowing beneath it (S 3:15, 198; 4:57; 9:72; 15:44; 18:31; 22:3; 37:42 ff.; 38:49 ff.; 47:15; 56:11 ff.; 76:5 ff.). The majority of Islamic concepts, including the aforementioned concept of heaven, can be traced to the religion’s roots in the desert, where hardship of life dominates in the harsh desert environment. In the hot barren wastes of Arabia, a dreamland would be conceived as a series of gardens with flowing brooks, with plenty of food and drink and virgins for companions (S 56:1-40; 69:21-24).

The most graphic expression of activities in heaven comes from Surah 56:1-40. In the Garden of Bliss, believers will recline on couches made of expensive gem stones and will be served by youths (young men) of perpetual freshness while drinking from the river of wine without being intoxicated, eating fruits and meats as they wish, and enjoying the companionship of perpetual virgins with beautiful, big, lustrous, pearl-like eyes. A Muslim commentator

expressed “The companionship of Beauty and Grace is one of the highest pleasures of life” (Ali 1989:1410). These activities are basically forbidden on earth, but allowed in heaven as a reward to believers for their good deeds in the past life. Muslims also teach that heaven is a place where one’s desire can be fulfilled as described in Surah 78:31: “Verily for the righteous there will be fulfilment of (the Heart's) desires.”

The main issue of the heavenly activities of Muslims is not what they do but what they are supposed to do. If God wanted to maintain his immanent relationship with his people, the Qur’an would reflect the believers’ activities of having worship or fellowship with God. However, the Qur’anic account of activities totally avoids God’s immanent state toward the believers. The majority of the Qur’anic account of heaven is a description of believers being served by young servants or slaves, men and women, when they are supposed to be having worship or fellowship with God. This implies that after Adam sinned against God, God maintained his transcendence from sinful man by expelling Adam to earth. Afterward, even in his abode, heaven, God maintains his transcendence toward man.

4.2.3.2 Activity in the Garden and the believers: Biblical view

For Christians, heaven is a place of personal fellowship with God. It is the dwelling of God and the source of blessing, a setting of life, and the place where God’s planned salvation is already present. Heaven is the completion of the Christian’s pilgrimage, the end of the struggle against flesh, the world, and the devil (Erickson 1985:1230; Grudem 1994:1158-1165). Heaven, for the Christian, is not something to earn but God’s free gift to his children so that they may have intimate fellowship.

In contrast to the self-focused heavenly activities in the Qur'an, Christians enjoy intimate fellowship with God in heaven, for God is their Father (Jn 1:12). Smith (1980:190-200) provides a description of Christians' activities in heaven such as worship, service, authority, fellowship, learning, and resting. Before the throne of God, believers serve and worship the triune God (Rv 7:15; 19:1-8; 22:3; Ps 29:2; 95:6; 96:9; 132:7; Heb 1:6). The believer has authority with Christ (Rm 4:13; Lk 19:17, 19; Mt 25:21, 23; Ps 2:8), fellowship with God in glory (Heb 12:23; Rv 19:19), and fellowship with fellow believers (Lk 16:23). The believers will have perfect knowledge (1 Cor 13:9-12; 1 Jn 3:2) and rest from sin but not from worship (Zph 3:17; Heb 3:11, 18; 4:9-11).

Since heaven is the place of believers after this life, activities in the biblical Garden of Eden, which is on earth, may shed a better understanding of the transcendence of God. We have already discussed the naming of the birds and the animals as man's participation in God's creation, and thus closing the gap on the innate quality of the transcendence of God. In addition to the naming process, Genesis 2:15 ("The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it") may lead us to another insight into God's transcendence in the Garden of Eden.

The majority of English translations of Genesis 2:15 provide a plain implication of God's purpose for man as servant or gardener in the Garden of Eden. However, there are two important interpretative issues in the Hebrew words. First, the literal translation of the verse hints that the verse means something more than a simple gardener, "And Jehovah [*the LORD*

in NIV]⁴⁹ God took the man, and caused him to rest [*put* in NIV] in the garden of Eden, to serve [*work* in NIV] it, and to keep [*take care* in NIV] it.”

The New International Version and other English translations give the verbal ideas of the word, *וַיַּנְחֵהוּ* (נִיחַ), as “put” or “place.” However, the word *נִיחַ* is frequently used to indicate “rest” (Gn 8:4; 20:11; 33:14; Nu 10:36; 11:26; Dt 3:20; 12:10; Jos 1:15; etc.), especially when it is associated with God’s action. It means “(giving) rest” rather than “place” in Genesis 2:15. Sailhammer (1994:7) confirms the interpretation, “Man was ‘put’ into the garden where he could ‘rest’ and be ‘safe,’ and he was ‘put’ into the garden ‘in God’s presence’ where he could have fellowship with God (3:8).” Furthermore, the Midrash confirms the “rest” nuance of the word by saying that God gave Adam the precept of Sabbath (Zlotowitz 1980:99).

Other interpretive issues are connected with God’s purpose for man in the Garden. After creating the Garden (Gn 2:8), God placed (*וַיַּנְחֵהוּ*, caused to rest) man in the Garden to work it (*לְעֲבָדָהּ*) and to take care of it (*וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ*). The issue here is the meaning of the verbs and the feminine suffix ending in both words. The word *עָבַד* (work) could be translated as “serve” or “worship” (Ex 12:31), while the word *שָׁמַר* (take care, keep) can mean “observe” or “obey” (Ex 34:11). In fact, *עָבַד* is more often translated as “serve” and “worship” (166 times) than “work” (27 times). The word *שָׁמַר* is almost equally translated as “take care” (113 times) and “obey” or “observe” (90 times) (Kohlenberger III & Swanson 1998:1158, 1612). With these

⁴⁹ The NIV translation of “the LORD” comes from the Hebrew word, *יהוה*, which is God’s personal name in the Old Testament (Ex 3:14-15). This divine name was considered too sacred to be pronounced; so the consonants of this word were written in the text while the reading and translation followed the vowel points of the Hebrew word, *אֲדֹנָי* “Lord” (Weingreen 1959:23).

nuances in the words with the word נִיחַ as “rest” or “placed safely,” Genesis 2:15 could render its meaning as “the LORD God took the man and rested him safely in the Garden of Eden to worship and to obey him.” However, the interpretation of the feminine suffix הַ in the two verbs, עָבַד and שָׁמַר, will determine the meaning of the text.

The argument of the final הַ is the gender of its controlling words in Genesis 2:15. The controlling words, “in the Garden of Eden, בְּגֵן-עֵדֶן,” are both masculine singular, and thus logically the final הַ (feminine singular) is not referring to man’s work in the Garden. Sailhammer (1994:7) supports the argument of gender difference by providing the purpose of man as not working in the Garden. He asserts that ““to work the ground” is said to be a result of the Fall, and the narrative suggests that the author had intended such a punishment to be seen as an ironic reversal of the man’s original purpose.”

In light of the above objections, Sailhammer (1994:7) concludes the meaning of the two words is “to worship and to obey.” He asserts that man is put in the Garden to worship God and to obey him. His argument of Genesis 2:15 under the large scope of Genesis makes a valuable discussion in biblical theology. As God created man to worship him (Is 43:7), man’s purpose in the Garden is more logically concluded to be worship of God rather than to merely work in the Garden or ground, as this is the result of sin in Genesis 3:23. However, Sailhammer does not provide arguments on the syntactical problem of the final הַ.

Waltke and O’Connor (1990:104), in their discussion of “Zero-marked Gender Nouns,” reckon that there is an exception as the head noun continues to control the gender of the phrase and the place name determines the gender of the phrase. They say: “There are exceptions to this pattern, in which the place name determines the gender of the phrase; for

example, גֵן is usually masculine, but the phrase גֵן־עֵדֶן is feminine (Gen 2:15).” The exception to the head noun controlling the phrase provides an answer to man working on the ground of the Garden. However, the word “garden” appears as a feminine noun form (גִּנָּה) in the Old Testament in the following verses: Numbers 24:6; Esther 1:5; 7:7, 8; Job 8:16; Ecclesiastes 2:5; Song of Songs 6:11; Isaiah 1:29, 30; 61:11; 65:2; 66:17; Jeremiah 29:5, 28; Amos 4:9; 9:14. Therefore, if the writer intended to refer to the final ה as the Garden of Eden, then it would be logical to use the word גִּנָּה, not גֵן. Another look at the final ה may confirm the true intention of man being in the Garden.

Skinner (1980:66) produces another possible reading based on the final ה. He says: “Since גֵן is nowhere fem., it is better to point לעבדה לשמרה.” Skinner provides a simple solution for the problem by changing the verb עבד (to work) into a feminine noun עבדה (service, worship). This is possible, since in the Old Testament there are many examples of this usage (Ex 1:14; Lev 23:7, 8, 21, 25, 35, 36; Nm 4:23, 47; 28:18, 25, 26; 29:1, 12, 35; Dt 26:6; Lam 1:3; Ex 29:18). However, there is only one example of the biblical usage of the verb שמר (to keep) as a feminine noun שמרה (guard, watch) in Psalms 141:3.

Another possible interpretation of the final ה is to treat it as an external reference. God said, “but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex 20:6). This is God’s promise of blessing to his people who are to faithfully keep and obey his commandments (feminine noun). The original purpose of man’s creation reflects this conditional blessing as in Genesis 1:28, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” It is God’s first act after his creation of man, reflecting the purpose of man’s being. Consequently,

God placed man in the Garden in order to bless them by giving them the condition to worship and obey it (the commandment). This is one of the major biblical themes which is evident throughout the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 11:27-28 clearly reflects the theme of blessing and curse depending upon the believers' obedience to God's commandments: "the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known." Then, in Genesis 2:15, it is possible to look at the final $\bar{\imath}$ as a reference to God's commandment and translate as, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *worship* and *obey the commandment*."

With respect to man's purpose in the Garden before the Fall, to worship and perform service to God, it can be said that man was with God. Adam, then, was reflecting a spacio-relationship between God and man when he was fulfilling his purpose in the Garden. In the Qur'anic account, the man's purpose of dwelling in the Garden is for a trial of the heart before God would set him as vicegerent on earth (Maududi 1977:60, 62). In the biblical account, if man is to worship God in the Garden while God is in the Garden, then there is no spatial-transcendence between man and God. The Qur'an already indicates that man was in the heavenly Garden which is a dwelling place of God while the Bible indicates the Garden is on earth where the transcendence of God is clearly manifested.

The Old Testament provides a few indications of God's presence in the Garden. Isaiah 51:3 reads that God will restore Zion [Jerusalem] like Eden which is "the garden of the LORD." Ezekiel 28:13 also says that Eden was the garden of God. Hence a figure of divine presence is in his own Garden, as we read that God walked about there (Gn 3:8). Furthermore, it seems

that the presence of cherubim at Eden's entrance (Gn 3:24; Ez 28:14) reflects the presence of God in the Garden for "Wherever one finds a cherub (whether as a decorative feature or a mythical creature), one finds divine presence" (Sommer 2001:49).

The Qur'anic account of the Garden may have been composed to avoid showing the presence of both man and God on earth, while the biblical account displays the immanent relationship of God with man. The spatial-transcendence of God becomes clear with the reaction of God toward the Fall in Genesis 3, where God is walking around the Garden before expelling man from his presence. This is further discussed in the following section (4.2.4). The Qur'anic account displays the spatial-transcendence of God as a result of man's sin. They were expelled from the heavenly garden toward earth (S 7:24).

4.2.4 Fall of Man

Both the Qur'an and the Bible render an account of the Fall of man. There are three major references to the Fall in the Qur'an: Surah 2:35-39, 7:19-25, and 20:120-123. Of these three references, Surah 7:19-25 is the most comprehensive reference to the corresponding biblical reference, Genesis 2:16-17 and the entirety of Chapter 3. The Qur'anic account of the Fall is more detailed than the corresponding biblical account.

God's command to man appears to be identical in both the Qur'an and the Bible. "O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and enjoy (its good things) [literally 'eat' as in S 2:35] as ye wish: but approach not this tree or ye run into harm and transgression" (S 7:19). This account also appears in Surah 2:35 and is comparable to Genesis 2:16-17. The difference is that the biblical account indicates the man is not to eat from "the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil” while the Qur’anic account says not to approach the tree. The Tree of Eternity [life] in Surah 20:120 is identified as “this tree” in Surah 7:19 and “the tree of life” in Genesis 2:9. Surah 20:120 confirms “this tree” (S 7:19) is the tree that Satan tempted with, by deceptive suggestions.

The temptation of Satan appears in Surah 2:36, 7:20-21, 20:120, and Genesis 3:1-5:

Surah 7:20-21 ²⁰Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said “Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest ye should become angels or such beings as live for ever.” ²¹And he swore to them both that he was their sincere adviser.

Genesis 3:1-5 ¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.” ⁴“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

According to Satan, God forbade the fruit because man may become angels or immortals in the Qur’anic account (S 7:20), while the biblical account indicates that the man may “become like God, knowing good and evil” (Gn 3:5). Since Islam defines the immanence of God

(*tashbih*) based on the assignment of man's physical attributes to God, the literal understanding of the biblical account of "became like God" may be avoided by replacing God with angels, which is lower in finite status of glory, for angels must bow to man (S 2:34).

The account of the Fall and God's reaction toward the Fall are in Surah 7:22, 20:121, and Genesis 3:6-11. Surah 7:22 provides an overview of the Fall and God's reaction as, "So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: 'Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you that satan was an avowed enemy unto you?'"

The biblical account (Gn 3:6-7) provides details of the Fall proceeding from woman to man while the Qur'an simply states the fact. The major events of the Fall (the Fall, man's and God's reaction) are identical in both accounts. However, the Qur'an seems to provide a simple narrative to both accounts of the Fall and God's reaction. The Qur'an merely states that God called man and spoke to them, while the Bible provides evidence of God's spatial-immanence in the presence of Adam and Eve as indicated in Genesis 3:8: "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."

Man's defensive act and God's individual punishment to woman, man, and Satan are shown in Genesis 3:12-19. The Qur'an has no details of the defensive act of man nor the announcement of the individual punishments. On the other hand, Surah 7:23 shows that man repented of their sin: "They said: 'our Lord! we have wronged our own souls: if Thou forgive

us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy we shall certainly be lost.” Then they were forgiven their sin (S 2:37). For this reason, Islam denies the doctrine of original sin. Since the biblical Adam and Eve did not repent of their sin, the sinful state and condition of man became hereditary as man marred the image of God that was originally intended to be upon the man (Gn 1:26-27).

The man and the woman’s collective punishment is shown in the form of expulsion from the Garden of Eden in the Bible and the Qur’an (Gn 3:20-24; S 2:36, 38; 7:24-25; 20:123).

Surah 7:24-25 ²⁴(Allah) said: “Get ye [Man and Satan] down with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time.” ²⁵He said: “therein shall ye live and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last).”

Genesis 3:19-24 ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” ²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The biblical account clearly shows that man, as Adam and Eve an allegory of human destiny, was punished for their disobedience through the expulsion from the Garden. However, the Qur'an is unclear on this issue. Based on the purpose of man as vicegerent on earth (S 2:30; 7:129; 24:55; 35:39; 38:26) and God's forgiveness of the sin of the man (S 2:37), it seems that man's descent to earth was not punishment for the man but fulfilment of the purpose of man. Maududi (1977:17) confirms that the destiny of man as *khalifah* on earth is due to man's repentance of their sin. He argues that God's command to man, "Go down" should not give rise to the misunderstanding that they were exiled from Paradise as a punishment for their disobedience. On the other hand they were sent to the earth as God's vicegerents, and this was the very purpose of the creation of man.

However, the language of the biblical account shows that expulsion is the punishment for the man's sin. God imposed upon man the task of working on the cursed ground that "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Gn 3:19). Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree in the Garden (Gn 2:16), but now are to work in order to survive. Furthermore, God used the language of *expulsion* such as "banished" and "drove out" the man from the Garden in contrast to the language of *accommodation* as, "put [caused him rest]" him in the Garden before the Fall (Gn 2:15). Finally, guarding the Garden from man and prohibiting him to enter and eat from the tree of life, which was previously allowed to him to eat from it freely and live forever, shows that man was to die because of his sinful act toward God.

From the above observation of the text of the Qur'an and the Bible, it is evident that the accounts of the Fall are quite similar. However, there are some critical differences in understanding the text. There is a difference in the purpose of the exile from the Garden. The

biblical account shows that the exile is a form of punishment for man's sin while the Qur'anic detail indicates the fulfilment of the man's purpose as vicegerent on earth. The Fall was their test in the Garden for their obedience. Furthermore, man has repented and God forgave him in the Qur'anic account while the Bible indicates that man did not repent nor was the sin forgiven. For this reason, the sinful nature of man remains in humankind in Christianity while Islam denies the need for the atonement of mankind.

The most notable difference in the accounts of the Fall is man's relation to God. In the temptation, Satan indicates that man can be like angels in the Qur'an (S 7:20). The biblical temptation indicates that man "will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gn 3:5). The Qur'anic reference to man becoming like angels, avoids any possibility of man's ability to transcend over other creation to bridge the gap of God's transcendence from the creation. However, the Bible opens the possibility of man's approach to God with his God-like character of "knowing good and evil."

The man's subsequent response to the Fall indicates another aspect of man's relation to God. The Qur'an says, "when they tasted of the tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies" (S 7:22). Adam and Eve felt the shame of their nakedness after they tasted the fruit and covered themselves from each other. Maududi (1977:13) confirms: "Then Satan tempted them so that he might reveal to them their shameful parts which had been hidden from each other." Conversely, Genesis 3:10 indicates that Adam and Eve were hiding their physical exposure of nakedness from God. This would mean, at least from the understanding of Adam and Eve, that God could be present in the Garden in their ontological understanding. They perceived that they were naked and made the coverings themselves, and they wanted to hide from God. The reason that they

made a covering (Gn 3:7) is not to hide from each other but from God. Wenham (1987:76) asks the same question: “But who are the couple trying to hide from? From each other or from God?” Then Wenham (1987:76) concludes that Adam and Eve’s behaviour before meeting God shows that they had a sense of guilt before God addressed them. Their sense of guilt and the reaction in Genesis 3:8 where they show the intensive-reflexive (*hithpael*, וַיִּתְחַבֵּא) act of hiding from God confirms that they were hiding from God. Thus this biblical account undoubtedly indicates the immanence of God as Adam and Eve were hiding from God. On the other hand, the Qur’anic account does not hint of any possibility of the presence of an immanent God as Adam and Eve were hiding from each other, not from God.

Further indication of God’s presence in the Garden in the biblical account is shown in God’s reaction to the Fall. In Genesis 3:8 God was “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Then the man and his wife heard the sound of God walking about and hid among the trees of the Garden. The NIV and other English translations⁵⁰ indicate that God is physically present in the Garden as he is “walking,” which implicitly communicates that God is not completely transcendent from his creation. Baker and Kohlenberger III (1994:10) see the context of Genesis 3:8 as a prefiguring of God’s appearance at the mountain Sinai as “there too the people ‘heard the sound of the LORD our God.’” This is a definite sign of God’s presence among the people as well as with Adam in the Garden. The passage has been accepted generally that God appeared to be taking a customary daily stroll in the Garden of Eden as seen in many different versions of the translation of the phrase, “in the cool of the day” (הַיּוֹם הַלְהוֹיָהּ). For example, Wenham (1987:76) is of opinion that: “a daily chat between the Almighty and his creatures was customary.” Furthermore, the Jewish text, Jubilees, indicates

⁵⁰ E.g., *The Revised Standard Version*, *Young’s Literal*, *New American Standard*, *JPS Tanakh*, *King James*, *LXX Brenton English*, *New Revised Standard*, and etc.

that the Garden of Eden is God's dwelling (Wicks 1971:46). Hence, in the Garden, God is present in the biblical account of the Fall. This view possibly brings a conflict of divine transcendence since God and man appear in the same spatial location, which the Qur'an emphatically denies.

The new interpretative approach to Genesis 3:8 may shed a different understanding of God's reaction to man's Fall. The recent interpretation of the verse is based on the cognitive interpretation of the word הַיּוֹם (the day) and קוֹל (sound). Based on the Akkadian and Ugaritic uses of the words, Niehaus (1995:159) translates the verse as, "Then the man and his wife heard the thunder [קוֹל] of Yahweh God going back and forth [בְּתוֹךְ הַגַּן] in the garden in the wind of the storm [לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם], and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden." In this translation, the Lord God appeared in Genesis 3 not for his customary stroll in the Garden of Eden, but in a storm theophany appropriate to the ensuing scene of judgment (Grundke 2001:548). Kingsbury (1967:206) provides examples of God's appearance as a storming figure in a theophany: Psalms 18:9-14; 68:7-8(9); 77:16-19, Judges 5:4-5, Deuteronomy 33:2-3, Habakkuk 3:3-4, and Zechariah 9:14. These verses portray God's appearance before man as not friendly but as an intimidating circumstance. Furthermore, the fierce appearance of God is apparent when the following activity of God is examined. There was neither man's seeking for forgiveness nor God's forgiveness of man's sin; there was, instead, the curse of Adam and Eve and the serpent for their sin in Genesis 3. The announcement of the penalty of sin in Genesis 3 indicates God's appearance is not friendly but hostile toward Adam and Eve.

Taking into account God's appearance in the form of a storm theophany, Niehaus' translation would be feasible in the context of the transcendence-immanence of God in the Garden. The

man perceives the presence of God through the storm theophany, yet God maintains his transcendent status from man by concealing himself from man's sight, encompassed by the storm. Regardless of which translation is correct, both the traditional and the storm theophany translation in the biblical account of the Fall indicate the presence of God in the Garden on earth, while the Qur'an denies both the location of the Garden on earth as well as the presence of God with Adam on earth.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament account, the word *מִתְהַלֵּךְ* "going back and forth" indicates God's immanence. In Deuteronomy 23:14, God moves about in the camp of Israelites in order to protect them. The verse indicates that the condition of God's immanence is maintaining holiness (*קֳדְוֹשׁ*) of the camp. Similarly, 2 Samuel 7:6 indicates that God has been moving from place to place with his dwelling (tent) among the people of Israel. Even when the word (*מִתְהַלֵּךְ*) is used with a human, it indicates physical closeness to its subject. For example in Esther 2:11, Mordecai walked back and forth (*מִתְהַלֵּךְ*) near the courtyard of the harem where Esther stayed. In the biblical account, it is clear that God's immanence is noticeable to Adam and Eve.

The presence of God in the Garden is further supported by the representation of the cherubim and the flaming fire in the biblical account. Once the man and woman have sinned against God and are expelled from the Garden, God places the cherubim and flaming sword on the east side of the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:24). Both the fire and cherubim represent the presence of God in the Old Testament. The fire indicates God's judgment with the immediate presence of God as in the case of Nadab and Abihu. When they made unauthorised fire before God, fire came out from the presence of God and consumed them (Lev 10:1-2, cf. Nm 3:4; 26:61; Lev 9:24; 10:2). The presence of cherubim denotes God's physical presence throughout the

Old Testament (Sommer 2001:49), as the cherubim serve as God's throne (1Sm 4:4; 2 Sm 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6 Is 37:16). God rides on and speaks from the middle of cherubim (2 Sm 22:11; Ps 18:10). Furthermore, it is God's garden (Is 51:3; Ez 28:13) that cherubim are supposed to guard and protect (Ez 28:14; 10:3) from trespassing by man. Therefore the presence of cherubim and the flaming fire in the Garden are positive indications of God's presence in the Garden of Eden.

The final concern of the Fall is the implication of the temptation of Satan. In the biblical account of the temptation, there were two trees planted in the middle of the Garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:9).⁵¹ Even though it was not directly indicated in the account of the temptation, the woman was clearly tempted with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for she says, "desirable for gaining wisdom" (Gn 3:6). The serpent also says, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gn 3:5). Furthermore, God prohibited man to take fruit from the tree of life after the Fall and banished man from the Garden with cherubims and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree (Gn 3:22-23). Evidently, the man and woman took the fruit of the tree of knowledge and planned to take the other fruit, the tree of life, to live like God as in Genesis 3:22, "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."

⁵¹ Some regarded the two trees as actually one tree (Wenham 1987:62). Both are said to be located in the middle of the Garden (Gn 2:9). The implication of the Hebrew phrase "in the middle of the garden" (בְּתוֹךְ-הַגַּן) as the exact centre of the Garden, one exact location, and the function of ך, and the singular reference of the tree (הָעֵץ) in Genesis 3:3 may call for further study. However, the fact that God mentioned the tree of life after the Fall indicates that they are two different trees (Gn 3:22-23).

Genesis has already stated that man was created in the image of God (Gn 1:26, 28). However, the result of the Fall shows yet another aspect of man's likeness to God, for God responds to the Fall by saying, "The man has now become like one of us [God]" (Gn 3:22). This could be interpreted to mean that man has become like God by acquiring a characteristic of a divine being ("knowing good and evil"), against God's will (Gunkel [1901] 1997:23). Therefore, the biblical account confirms man's likeness to God.

On the other hand, the Qur'anic account of the temptation seems to deny man's bearing the attributes or the likeness of God. Satan uses "the Tree of Eternity" to tempt man to live forever (S 7:20; 20:120); this correlates to the biblical Tree of Life. Even in God's rebuke to man, he identifies the tree as the one Satan used to tempt man, the tree of eternity (S 7:22). The Qur'an itself testifies that the biblical creation account was accessible to Muhammad and others during the Qur'anic period as the source of the Qur'an (S 3:3; 4:47; 5:49; 10:37). However, the account of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil may have been left out perhaps because of the biblical implication that man is like God in knowing good and evil. In response, because Muslims view the Bible as inauthentic, they will argue that Christians altered the Bible to fit their beliefs (Jomier 1964:28). This possible work of a redactor to the Qur'anic text provides some understanding of the difference between the Bible and the Qur'an, and may also shed some light on Islam's understanding of the transcendence of God.

The Qur'anic view of the Fall starts with the creation of man. In the beginning of God's creation of man, the God of the Qur'an bestows upon man his attributes: knowledge and free-will (Nolin 1964:9). The knowledge is first reflected in the narrative of Adam's naming of the animals. Nolin (1964:10) defines free-will as: "the capacity *not* to follow His commands by making him capable of choosing to follow either one of two choices." The passages in Surah

20:120-121, 7:20-22 and 2:36 deal with Adam's sin based on this free-will. However, on the argument of the innocence of the prophet from all sins, Shafi (2005a:179) reasons that Adam's sin against God was based on his error through a misunderstanding or just forgetfulness. It is never a deliberate and wilful transgression of divine commandment. And the result of sin causes Adam's separation from God; he was sent down to earth from the heavenly garden (S 7:24-25). Within the references to the passages in Surah 2:36, 38-9, 7:24-25, 20:123-124, "Muslim interpretation has emphasised the repeated Qur'anic phrase translated here 'temporarily,' *ila hin*, thus taking this as a temporary deprivation for an isolated act, rather than a symbolic act in which all mankind is deprived of fellowship with God" (Nolin 1964:10). Here, in the Muslim viewpoint, Adam is definitely acquitted of his sin as God also forgave him (S 2:37), and is able to continue his fellowship with God. However, at the time of Adam's residency on earth, he is separated and isolated from God's presence. In other words, God's transcendent state from man is due to man's temporal rebellion based on his free-will against God. While maintaining God's transcendent state, the interpretation provides for the possible future immanence of God, as the transcendence in this context is temporal and based on an isolated act of man.

On the other hand, it is clear that the biblical account of the Fall indicates the movement of God's immanence to transcendence. The result of the Fall indicates the expulsion of man from the presence of God in the Garden of the Eden as well as the self-provision of the daily necessities of man (Gn 3:19) rather than God's provision of food (Gn 2:16). As God is capable of fellowship with man (Smith 2003:27), he initiates his immanence with man by creating man and the Garden to be a place of fellowship. However, it is man's wilful action which results in the transcendence of God, with God having maintained a distance from man who is now sinful and not willing to return to God. The Qur'anic Adam and Eve turned back

to God and God restored their status of *khalifa*. The Qur’anic God maintains his absolute transcendent state by sending them to earth. On the other hand “the Genesis pair deliberately turn away from God and so do not turn back. The consequences of the turning away are extensive, and the guard over the entrance to Eden (3.24) shows that there is no return” (Glaser 1997:15). As a result, Adam and Eve of the Bible, representing the entire human race, created spatial distance between God and man because of their consequences of sin.

4.2.5 Conclusion

The origin of God’s relations with man in the Bible and the Qur’an has been shown in the account of Adam. In the biblical account of Adam, there is both an immanent and transcendent relationship with God. The spatial relationship of God in the Garden shows God’s immanent acts with man. God allows Adam to name the animals and birds as well as fellowship with him in the Garden. The account of the Fall indicates that God was locally in the Garden with Adam and Eve. The Fall was also the beginning of God’s spatial transcendence from man. As the result of sin, Adam and Eve were expelled from the presence of God and thus God’s spatial transcendence was initiated.

On the other hand, the Qur’anic account of Adam and Eve indicates that God created man for his *khalefah*. Adam and Eve were tested in the heavenly garden before they were sent to earth to fulfil the purpose of man’s creation. They were tested through memorizing the names of all things as well as tested for submission to prove the quality of *khalefah*. They repented of their sin against God, which proved their submission to God. Therefore, they were sent to earth, creating the spatial transcendence of God. Even in the account of the activities in the

heavenly garden, there was no indication of God's immanence. Thus, in the Qur'anic account of Adam, God maintained absolute transcendence status before man.

4.3 TRANSCENDENT GOD AND ABRAHAM

4.3.1 Introduction

Abraham is regarded as the father of all nations as well as an example of outstanding faith in the One Supreme God by Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Bible records accounts of Abraham in Genesis 11:26 to 25:10 and Joshua 24:2-3. The Old Testament account is well summarised in the New Testament by Stephen in Acts 7:2-8. In the Qur'an, the account of Abraham appears more than sixty times spread out over twenty four different Surahs (S 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 29, 33, 37, 38, 42, 43, 51, 53, 57, 60, 87).

In Islam, Abraham (Ibrahim) is treated as one of the six great prophets to whom God sends down revelation. The six prophets and the revelation given are: Adam (*Sahifah*), Abraham (*Suhuf*), Moses (*Taurat*), David (*Zabur*), Jesus (*Injil*), and Mohammad (the Qur'an). Tradition also adds Seth (*Sahifah*) and Enoch (*Sahifah*) as prophets who received a revelation from God (Hughes [1885] 1998:475). Among the six prophets, the Qur'an deals with Abraham prominently. The major Qur'anic episodes of the account of Abraham, such as his travelling with Lot and the promise of progeny, the angels' visit and announcement of his son, his pleading for Lot, and the sacrifice of his son, can be easily identified and compared with those from the Bible. However, there are some stories that do not appear in the Bible.

As a prophet Abraham received a revelation for mankind (S 87:19; 53:36-37). Today, the copy of this revelation is considered to be lost (Ali 1989:1638). Furthermore, as the most forceful preacher, Abraham preached against idolatry and the worship of heavenly bodies in many places (S 6:74-82; 19:42-48; 21:52-65; 26:69-84; 29:16-17; 37:85-96; 43:26-27). Abraham even dismantled the idol and faced a plot of assassination by fire, which the Qur'an indicates in Surah 21:57-58 and 29:24,

Surah 21:57-58 ⁵⁷And by Allah I have a plan for your idols after ye go away and turn your backs” ⁵⁸So he broke them to pieces (all) but the biggest of them that they might turn (and address themselves) to it.

Surah 29:24 So naught was the answer of (Abraham's) people except that they said: “Slay him or burn him.” But Allah did save him from the fire: verily in this are Signs for people who believe.

Additionally, Abraham appears in the Qur'an as the builder of the Kaaba (S 2:125-127; 3:96-97) and the one who purified it (S 22:26). As Abraham and Ishmael settled in Mecca, they probably built the Kaaba. Ishmael later became the ancestor of Meccans or Arabs (Busse 1998:88). However, according to other traditions, the founding of the Kaaba is traced back to Adam who erected the Kaaba exactly below the spot of its heavenly model (Hughes [1885] 1998:257).

Finally, Islam does not consider Abraham a Jew nor a Christian, but having his own religion, since the Scriptures of both religions were revealed after Abraham's time (S 2:130; 3:58-60).

He is called *Hanifite*, one who has yielded to God and become his friend. Surah 3:65-67 confirms:

Surah 3:65-67 ⁶⁵Ye people of the Book! why dispute ye about Abraham when the Law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding? ⁶⁶Ah! ye are those who fell to disputing (even) in matters of which ye had some knowledge! but why dispute ye in matters of which ye have no knowledge? It is Allah Who knows and ye who know not! ⁶⁷Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian but he was true in faith and bowed his will to Allah's (which is Islam) and he joined not gods with Allah.

However, due to the implication of the meaning of *Hanifite*, Islam has a tendency to treat Abraham as a first Muslim. Tottoli (2002:26) confirms this tendency of interpretation of Abraham in Islam that he was a *hanīf* who is a pure monotheist, neither Jew nor Christian. Thus, he is a precursor of the pure monotheism that is Islam.

Treating Abraham as a prophet and preacher, the builder of Kaaba, and a founder of his own religion is clearly so alien to the Bible that it is justified not to deal with it within the context of God's transcendent revelation in Islam as compared to the Bible. However, as the Qur'anic narrative contains a great deal of biblical materials, there are many accounts of Abraham which readily correlate with the biblical account. Examining these corresponding circumambient incidents of Abraham with God may reveal his transcending relationship with man in the Qur'an and the Bible.

4.3.2 Abraham as friend of God

Both the Qur'an and the Bible identify Abraham as "the friend of God." In the Qur'an, "friend" is translated from many different terms. The words *casher* (S 22:13) and *sadeq* (S 24:61; 26:101) are less popular terms indicating friends between men. When the Qur'an indicates a loyal or close friend or a relative, it uses the word *hamen* (S 70:10; 69:35). The more frequently used words for "friend" are *saahib* and *waley*. The word *saahib* is more likely used as "companion" or "inhabitant" (S 2:39; 7:42; 56:8) while the word *waley* indicates protection, which comes from God, Satan, or humans (S 12:101; 7:30; 5:55).

In reference to Abraham, the word *khalil* is used to indicate that God accepted him as a friend in Surah 4:125, "Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah does good and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend." In this verse, Abraham is identified as the one who sets an example for the believers. Therefore Ali (1989:225) comments on his status that "he was the fountainhead of the present monotheistic tradition, the Patriarch of the prophetic line, and is revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims."

For Abraham's faithfulness to God, God chose him to be his beloved friend as Asad (S 4:125) translates it: "God exalted Abraham with His love [Abraham for a friend]." Elsewhere in the Qur'an, the word for friend in the text, *khalil*, is used to indicate friendship against enmity (S 17:73; 25:28; 43:67). In these instances, the word *khalil* refers to relationship among men.

The derived words of *khalil*, *khalla* (mutual befriending) and *khullah* (friendship) are used in Surah 14:31 and 2:254 in reference to Surah 6:94 to express the impossibility of “ransom” through intercession on the Judgment Day. Surah 2:254 says: “O ye who believe! spend out of (the bounties) We have provided for you before the day comes when no bargaining (will avail) nor friendship [*khullah*] nor intercession. Those who reject faith they are the wrong-doers.” This is the context where the word “friendship” means ransom for one’s own sin. Usmani (2002a:144) confirms: “the Unbelievers wronged themselves by their own self-will to their own misfortune that they will neither avail themselves of any friendship [ransom for their sin] nor intercession in the Hereafter.”

The biblical word for friend for Abraham is אֱהָבָה. This word is used instead of the regular word for friend, רֵעַ, which refers to human relationships (Swanson 1997:8276). The word אֱהָבָה means “love,” and is used twice for Abraham as God’s friend (2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8).⁵² In both instances, the word refers to God’s love toward Abraham and thus is translated in that context as “friend.” This is supported by the LXX translation where the word, ἀγαπάω, is used to indicate divine love. The use of Greek word ἀγαπάω reflexes God’s greatest solicitude for Abraham in the context (Gingrich 1983:2).

There are others whose name means “friend of God” in the Old Testament such as Moses’ father-in-law, Reuel (רְעוּאֵל). This name appears eleven times in the Old Testament (Gn 36:4, 10, 13, 17 (x2); Ex 2:18; Nm 2:14; 10:29; 1 Ch 1:35, 37; 9:8). As Hebrew names reflect a man’s personal character or his essence (Neusner 1996:448), the name “Reuel” (friend of

⁵² In the English translation Job 29:4 and James 2:23 indicate both Abraham and Job as a friend of God which will be discussed in the next section (4.3.3).

God) may express man's wish to be close to God, using the word "friend" (רֵעַ). However, from God's point of view, friend is meant to be someone who is loved by him, and thus he uses the word אָהַב (love). In the case of Abraham, being called "friend of God," it is in a different context where God initiated the relationship by calling him his friend, not from a human desire to be a friend of God.

The Qur'anic use of the word *khalil* for friend may correspond to the biblical word for friend in reference to Abraham in the sense of a "beloved" or "faithful" servant. However, the Qur'an openly uses the word in the context of enmity between two companies (S 17:73; 25:28). With this reasoning, Surah 4:125 may indicate the fact that there is no enmity between God and Abraham due to his faithfulness.

Meanwhile, the biblical word for "friend" (אָהַב) associates with the fellowship between two parties, such as a father's love for his children (Gn 37:3), husband to his wife (Gn 24:67), between master and servant (Ex 21:5), keeping the commandments of God (Ps 119:97), loving aliens (Dt 10:19), and loving God (Dt 6:5).

In the New Testament, James (2:23) refers to Abraham as "God's friend," referring to 2 Chronicles 20:7 with a citation from Genesis 15:6. According to Genesis 15:6 where it reads "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness," the meaning of "God's friend" seems to correspond to the Qur'anic account of friendship with God. However, the New Testament's testimony became clear with the treatment of the word, "friend," by Jesus. John 15:15 reads, "I [Jesus] no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I

learned from my Father I have made known to you.” The root word for “friend” (φίλος) used by Jesus is φιλέω (to love, kiss) which means “to treat somebody as one of one’s own people.’ It is used for the love of spouses, of parents and children, of employers and servants, of friends, and of gods and those favoured by them” (Stählin 1985:1262). Here, in the context of John 15:15, Jesus would mean a nullification of servanthood into the co-operative relationship of friend. A servant or a slave does not have to know the will of the master but a friend is the one who knows the will of another. The disciples, in this context, became true friends to Jesus by knowing the will of God which was formally limited to Jesus “for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15).

Then, as Abraham was friendly with God in the Qur’an, he may have been an example of the believer who is respected by all believers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although the friendship of Abraham indicated in the Qur’an lacks immanent fellowship with God, it reflects approval of his faith. On the other hand, through fellowship with God in the Bible, Abraham became respectable and opened the possibility of the ontological experience of fellowship, a movement toward immanence over transcendence of God, as indicated in the next section of “God at the entrance of the tent.”

4.3.3 God at the entrance of the tent

In modern English translations⁵³ of the Old Testament, Job can also be called God’s friend. In Job 29:4 we read: “Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate

⁵³ New International Version (1984), New Revised Standard Version (1989), New American Standard Version (1995), etc.

friendship [בְּסֹדֶר אֱלֹהִים] blessed my house [אֶת־לְבָי, my tent]” (NIV). The Young Literal translation indicates God’s presence in the tent of Job: “As I have been in days of my maturity, And the counsel of God upon my tent.” The same context of friendship (סֹדֶר, counsel) is the heavenly counsel of angels in the tent of Abraham (Gn 18; S 11, 15). The Qur’anic account, Surah 15:51-53 and 11:69-74 present a detail of the honoured guests of Abraham. The corresponding biblical account of the guests of Abraham is from Genesis 18 with an account of Sodom and Lot in the following chapter, Genesis 19.

Surah 15:51-53 ⁵¹Tell them about the guests of Abraham. ⁵²When they entered his presence and said “Peace!” He said “We feel afraid of you!” ⁵³They said: “Fear not! we give thee glad tidings of a son endowed with wisdom.”

Surah 11:69-77 ⁶⁹There came Our Messengers to Abraham with glad tidings. They said “Peace!” He answered “Peace!” and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf. ⁷⁰But when he saw their hands went not towards the (meal) he felt some mistrust of them and conceived a fear of them. They said: “Fear not: we have been sent against the people of Lut.” ⁷¹And his wife was standing (there) and she laughed: but We gave her glad tidings of Isaac and after him of Jacob. ⁷²She said: “Alas for me! Shall I bear a child seeing I am an old woman and my husband here is an old man? That would indeed be a wonderful thing!” ⁷³They said: “Dost thou wonder at Allah's decree? The grace of Allah and His blessings on you O ye people of the house! for He is indeed worthy of all praise full of all glory!” ⁷⁴When fear had passed from (the mind of) Abraham and the glad tidings had reached him he began to

plead with Us for Lut’s people. ⁷⁵For Abraham was without doubt forbearing (of faults) compassionate and given to look to Allah. ⁷⁶O Abraham! seek not this. The decree of thy Lord hath gone forth: for them there cometh a Penalty that cannot be turned back! ⁷⁷When Our Messengers came to Lut he was grieved on their account and felt himself powerless (to protect) them. He said: “This is a distressful day.”

The corresponding account of Abraham in the Bible is the entire chapter of Genesis 18. Here the text is reproduced in an abbreviated format.

Genesis 18:1-33 ¹The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them... met them...said...⁵Let me get you something to eat...⁸While they ate, he stood near them under a tree...¹⁰Then the LORD said...Sarah your wife will have a son....¹²So Sarah laughed...“After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?”...Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...²⁰Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great...²²The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city...only ten can be found there?” He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.” ³³When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

The first observation is the corresponding appearance of the guests of Abraham in both the Qur'an and the Bible. In the Genesis account (Gn 18:1), it begins with an editorial comment of God's appearance before Abraham (Wenham 1994:45) with the three men representing the presence of God (Gn 18:2). Throughout the account the text assumes that the third man is God and thus addresses him as "the LORD" (יהוה, Yahweh), God's personal name. The Qur'an uses an editorial introduction to the story, saying, "There came Our Messengers to Abraham with glad tidings" (S 11:69). The Qur'an inter-changeably uses "guests" (S 15:51) and "messengers" (S 11:69) to refer to the visitors of Abraham.

The hospitality of Abraham follows immediately in both accounts. The Genesis account describes an extensive hospitality including washing feet, resting, and feasting with bread and tender calf. Yet, the Qur'an simplifies the account with the serving of food, a roasted calf, only. The difference in this account is that of the reactions of both the visitors and the host.

In the Bible, Abraham as the host, did not eat with the visitors but stood next to them as a servant (Gn 18:8). Mutual dining is seen throughout the Bible where the host sits with the guests and they eat together. For example, in Genesis 24:54, the chief servant of Abraham ate together with Laban's family, and in Judges 19:6 a hosting father sat down and ate together with his son-in-law. In Jeremiah 41:1, Ishmael son of Nethaniah with his ten men came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam and they ate together. In the case of Joseph and his brothers, there was the Egyptian cultural issue of not eating together with foreigners or shepherds (Gn 43:32; 46:34). In spite of this cultural barrier, they did eat together by serving Joseph's brothers at separate tables. Yet, Joseph, as the host of the meal, shared portions of his meal with his brothers, enabling all the guests at the meal to eat and drink gratifyingly (Gn 43:32, 34).

However, the visitors in the Qur'an did not eat the meal before them. This brought Abraham to fear them (S 11:70). In response, the visitors comforted Abraham by announcing their purpose of visiting. In the introduction to the story the first purpose of visiting is clearly indicated as bringing "glad tidings." This is the announcement of Abraham's son Isaac by the visitors. Unlike the biblical account, the announcement of the son includes the name, "Isaac." The Bible only indicates a son, whom God had already promised to Abraham in Genesis 17:19 and 21. The name "Isaac (he laughed)" was given to the son of Abraham because of his laughter at God's word in Genesis 17:17.

The second purpose of visiting becomes evident as Abraham is afraid of the visitors. In response to Abraham's fear of hostility shown by the visitors who refuse to eat, the guests of the Qur'an comfort Abraham by announcing the judgment of "the people of Lut" (S 11:70). The announcement of the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah is readily agreeable with the biblical account. However, the Bible brings forth extensive dialogue between God (the LORD) and Abraham, indicating a counsel on the subject. A large portion of Chapter 18 is dedicated to God's announcement and Abraham's supplication for the righteous people in the city (Gn 18:16-33).

From observing the particular incident of the story of Abraham's visitors in the Qur'an and the Bible, there are a few major questions in reference to the transcendence of God. The Qur'an identifies the visitors as "guests" or "messengers" while the Bible inter-changeably uses God and men. In the process of finding God's relationship with Abraham in the text, the question arises: why does Yahweh appear to have a counsel with Abraham asking a kind of permission or informing the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, while the Qur'an only indicates the simple announcement that judgment must be dealt? These questions, including

how the text indicates the visitors and whether Abraham recognised them and behaved accordingly as the text indicates, will provide insight into Abraham's ontological understanding of God.

As the Old Testament begins the story of Abraham's visitors with "The LORD [יהוה] appeared to Abraham" (Gn 18:1), the identification of the visitors is crucial to the discussion of the transcendence of God. Followed by the introduction of editorial comment, the text indicates that there are three visitors (אֲנָשִׁים, men), commonly understood as angels (הַמְלִאֲכִים, messengers) in Genesis 19:1. Throughout Genesis 18 and 19, the narrator indicates that one of the three angels is God by referring to him as "the LORD." The terminology of God, "the LORD" is derived from the practice of reading Hebrew based on *kethibh* (it is written) and *qere* (to be read). It is a deliberate change in reading which is made in reverence to the divine name (יהוה) that replaced the reading of the Hebrew word for the lord (אֲדֹנָי). Thus, the English translation of the divine personal name (יהוה) became the translation of *qere* אֲדֹנָי, "the LORD," in all capital letters while the normal use of אֲדֹנָי is translated as "the Lord." From the text it is clear that the third angel is understood by later readers as God. However, the understanding of the identity of the third angel by Abraham may differ from the text.

Even though Abraham understood that the three guests were an important party and the text indicates the third man as God, Abraham addresses him with the normal reference of a person who is superior to one, "the Lord" (אֲדֹנָי). This would indicate that Abraham, when he faced God, understood his identity to be no more than a man. This is supported by the context where the guests of Abraham eat the food he provides, while Abraham observes them eating (Gn 18:8). The fact that Abraham called God "the LORD" in Genesis 15 and later as "the Lord" (Gn 18) does not make any difference since the context in Genesis 15 is a vision, not

an actual manifestation of God. In Genesis 18 God appears before Abraham as a man, since Abraham recognised God and the other two as guests and provided them with food, which they ate. Even after finishing the meal, Abraham walked along with the guests (Gn 18:16). Therefore, Abraham's reference to God as "the Lord," reflects his understanding of the manifestation of God.

Furthermore, Genesis 18:22 indicates the locality of Abraham with God when they discuss the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the discussion, Abraham pleads with God by addressing him, "Judge of all the earth" (יְשֻׁפֵּט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ, Gn 18:25). This reference to God is only used here in the Old Testament. However, God is also portrayed as "the Judge" (יְשֻׁפֵּט) in Judges 11:27. With the scope of God's judgment "of all the earth," the phrase "Judge of all the earth" delineates God. Furthermore the acknowledgement of Abraham's recognition of God's ability, to judge Sodom and Gomorrah which Abraham accepts as fact, is beyond any human ability. Therefore, it is clear that both "the Lord" and "the LORD" in Genesis 18 refer to God himself.

Meanwhile, the Qur'an has only two guests in the story. The Qur'an does not use the word for angel (*malak*, מַלְאֲכָיִם) in connection with the guests of Abraham but rather the words messengers (*rusulnaa*, our messengers, S 11:69) and honoured guests (*dayf al-mukramen*, S 51:24). The term "our messengers" is often used to refer to heavenly messengers and angels (S 2:98; 10:13, 103; 13:32, 38; 18:106). The dual ending (-en) of the "honoured guests" indicates there are two angels who appeared to Abraham and Lot. In the Qur'anic context there is no mention of the biblical account of the third angel, who is identified as God (Gn 18:1ff.; cf. Gn 16:7, 13). However, Shafi (2005b:653), indicates that there are three angels,

Jibra'il, Mika'il, and Israfil. Even in this allegation of three angels appearing before Abraham, there is no indication of God's appearance before Abraham. Then, was there any possibility that the Qur'anic Abraham understood the guests as divine?

Abraham's reaction to the visitors may indicate that they are at least figures of authority and power. However, the motive for hosting the guests is not clear in the text. At any rate, from the respect of consuming his animal, Abraham recognises them as guests who deserve notable treatment. Immediately after the guests reject the meal, fear grows within Abraham because he understands the rejection as a sign of hostility. This fear further shows that the guests were more powerful than he was. Then comes Abraham's turning point in recognizing the guests as God's messengers in Surah 11:74.

Surah 11:74 indicates Abraham's recognition of the guests: "When fear had passed from (the mind of) Abraham and the glad tidings had reached him he began to plead with Us for Lot's people." Abraham accepts the announcement of his son Isaac's birth despite the old age of Sarah and himself. This acceptance removes his fear of the guests as he recognises that the announcement is from God. Subsequently Abraham immediately begins to "plead with Us" for Lot's people. This is another recognition of the guests as the ones who have the power of destruction. The request is answered by the guests negatively as: "O Abraham! seek not this. The decree of thy Lord hath gone forth: for them there cometh a Penalty that cannot be turned back!" (S 11:76). The guests' answer to Abraham's pleading for Lot shows that they are not divine figures as they are referring to the command from God.

In the biblical account Abraham pleads with God while the two angels are moving toward Sodom and Gomorrah. However, in the Qur'anic account, the two guests answer the plea of

Abraham, which indicates they have not yet departed from Abraham's tent. It is noticeable that Abraham pleads with God as the text indicates, "plead with Us." In this context, the guests are referred to in the third person while the narrator uses the first person. It is evident from the entire flow of the account that the narrator is God himself as the narrator uses the term, "Our messengers" repeatedly. If Mohammad is meant to be the narrator, then the messengers are from Mohammad while the text clearly indicates that they are from God. Then the context would pose another question concerning Abraham's understanding of the guests. Did he actually understand them as men, as messengers of God, and then as God when he pleaded for Lot? Or was God with the guests, but the text did not indicate his presence, because the Qur'an tries to avoid the immanence of God? Or rather, is it Abraham's supplication to the transcendent God through the interceding of the immanent guests? In view of the Islamic understanding of God the last solution is probably correct. Nonetheless, referring to the biblical account, there is the presence of the third guest in the Qur'anic account which is not displayed in order to avoid the immanence of God.

The final issue of the transcendence of God in the story of Abraham and his guests will be the question of who initiated the counsel, especially in the biblical account of Abraham's pleading for Lot. Both the Qur'anic and biblical accounts show that the guests came to Abraham. The Qur'an simply states that the guests came upon Abraham, but the biblical account shows that Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent and looking outward (Gn 18:1-2). This may be the habitual mid-day activity of Abraham (Wenham 1987:45). On the other hand, after having been promised a son by God (Gn 17), Abraham might have expected a visitation of God or messengers of God. This view may qualify as an argument because of Abraham's following behaviour in hosting the guests as significantly important. This can also

be true in the Qur'anic account as it has a limited explanation of the account and bases its story upon the Old Testament account.

The issue is, then, God's initiation of his counsel to Abraham concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the Qur'anic account, the account of God in the counsel is not confirmative since only the two guests answered Abraham's plea (S 11:70-76). However, in the biblical account, God remained with Abraham while the two angels left towards Sodom (Gn 18:22). In the first of the Tiqqune sopherim (ancient scribal corrections) of the Masoretic text, it is further intriguing as it is written, "the LORD stood before Abraham." The text was changed to "but Abraham remained standing before the LORD" on grounds of piety (Wenham 1994:37; Hamilton 1995:23). This would mean that God stands before Abraham voluntarily in order to have counsel with him. According to Genesis 18:22 the text here refers to God's initiation of the counsel. Abraham did not call to or approach God but God came to Abraham.

God's standing before man is not limited to the context of Abraham. There are similar incidents where God stands before man and conducts either counsel or gives commands to man. In Exodus 33:9-10 and Number 12:5, God speaks to man while he stands before the entrance to the tent of meeting in the form of a pillar of cloud. Thus, the counsel of God with Abraham is justified with other examples of God's communication throughout the Old Testament. Why, then, did God ask permission and why was he willing to negotiate the fate of Sodom with Abraham?

One possible view of why God seeks consent from Abraham is based on the issue of Sodom and Gomorrah being ancestral places belonging to Abraham. However, Keil and Delitzsch ([1891] 2002:147) oppose the view:

God then disclosed to Abraham what he was about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah, not, as *Kurtz* supposes, because Abraham had been constituted the hereditary possessor of the land, and Jehovah, being mindful of His covenant, would not do anything to it without his knowledge and assent (a thought quite foreign to the context), but because Jehovah had chosen him to be the father of the people of God, in order that, by instructing his descendants in the fear of God, he might lead them in the paths of righteousness, so that they might become partakers of the promised salvation, and not be overtaken by judgment.

Either view would mean that Abraham is not a mere subject under God, but as his title “friend of God,” indicates, he is someone who has access to God and is able to stand with him. In this view of friendship, the argument of God’s appearance before Abraham—instead of through an oracle, vision, or voice as he had done before—is to test Abraham and to have fellowship with him, making a coherent argument. As a friend of God, God allows Abraham to be able to have fellowship with him, including negotiating with him, as reflected in Genesis 18.

As in a friendship, the counsel at the entrance to Abraham’s tent reflects intimate fellowship with mutual assessment in the biblical account. This fellowship with God in the proximity of the tent implies the desire of an immanent God as is first seen in God’s promise of his

dwelling in the tent of Shem (Gn 9:27).⁵⁴ This is followed by Abraham's tent and then Moses' tent in the wilderness. Then, a tent in the Old Testament, when associated with God, implies the immanence of God, evidently reflected in this story of Abraham's tent and the counsel of God.

On the other hand, there is no account of the tent in the Qur'an. The Qur'an simply presents the account of Abraham without introduction of the tent. Therefore, it diminishes any indication of the biblical immanence of God. Furthermore, the Qur'anic Abraham's reaction was purely the ontological understanding of the guests. He, thus, was afraid of the guests when they refused to take the meal. Moreover, when Abraham is in counsel with the angels, it seems he understood that they were messengers from God. Thus, in the Qur'anic account of Abraham's tent, there is no indication of God's immanence but the absolute transcendence of God is reflected, as compared to the biblical account of the immanent God who maintains his ontological transcendence in the form of angel.

4.3.4 Test of Abraham

God tests man in order to know what is in the heart of man (Dt 8:2) and to build his faith in order to prevent him from sinning (Ex 20:20). In a similar way the Qur'an portrays, "Allah

⁵⁴ Kaiser (1978:83) interprets Gn 9:27 as the later concept of Mosaic theology of the Shekinah glory of God where the presence of God over the tabernacle was evident by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He perceives Gn 9:27 as a promise of Seed who will dwell among the line (tent) of Shem, the heir of Jesus. The NIV translates it as: "May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave." However, in Hebrew, there is no word such as "Japheth" in the second clause. It is simply "may he live..." Due to the consecutive narration of God's action of prophecy upon all three sons (two sons and one grandson), it is proper to translate as "may God live in the tents of Shem."

might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts: for Allah knoweth well the secrets of your hearts” (S 3:154). Surah 34:21 also indicates, “We might test the man who believes in the Hereafter from him who is in doubt concerning it: and thy Lord doth watch over all things.” The test of God in the Qur’an implies that God does not know the heart of man, and thus he “tests,” “may try,” or “might know” the secret of man. However, Islamic commentators explain it as a case where God does know the will of man but is testing him in order to help the man subjectively, to train the will, and purge man of grosser motives (Ali 1989:167, 1091).

The way God tests Abraham with his son and the subsequent provision for the sacrifice is the same in both the Bible and the Qur’an. Both Scriptures identify the episode as a test of Abraham. In the test, one of the possible contradictions between the Qur’an and the Bible is the identity of Abraham’s son who accompanied him to the site of sacrifice. In the Qur’anic account, Abraham and his unidentified son (Ishmael)⁵⁵ are the main figures of the story in Surah 37:102-113.

Surah 37:102-113 ¹⁰²Then when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him he said: “O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: now see what is thy view!” (The son) said: “O my father! do as thou art commanded: thou wilt find me if Allah so wills one practicing Patience and Constancy!” ¹⁰³So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah) and He had laid Him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice) ¹⁰⁴We called out to him “O Abraham!” ¹⁰⁵“Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!”

⁵⁵ The Qur’an does not identify the son of Abraham, but the son is unanimously accepted as Ishmael among Qur’anic scholars and believers alike.

thus indeed do We reward those who do right. ¹⁰⁶For this was obviously a trial ¹⁰⁷And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: ¹⁰⁸And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times: ¹⁰⁹“Peace and salutation to Abraham!” ¹¹⁰Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. ¹¹¹For he was one of Our believing Servants. ¹¹²And We gave him the good news of Isaac a prophet one of the Righteous. ¹¹³We blessed him and Isaac: but of their progeny are (some) that do right and (some) that obviously do wrong to their own souls.

Unlike the Qur’anic account of Abraham’s test, the biblical account indicates the identification of the son as Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19. The New Testament account testifies that the son was Isaac. James 2:21 reads, “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” The Genesis account of the story includes much more detail than the Qur’anic account, including the location of the sacrifice, provisions for sacrifice such as fire, fire wood, knife, and the travelling method with the servant.

Genesis 22:1-19 ¹Some time later God tested Abraham...“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering...Abraham...saddled his donkey ...took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac...took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. ⁷ Isaac spoke up...“Father?”...where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”...they reached the place...Abraham built an

altar...bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar...took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” ¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you... ¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Both the Qur’an and the Bible convincingly indicate that the purpose of sacrificing the son was to test Abraham. Genesis identifies the test in the beginning of the episode as an introduction (Gn 22:1) while the Qur’an makes clear that the story is a test in the middle of the story (S 37:106). The purpose of the test is not indicated in both texts but the results were identical. Abraham was blessed by God in the generations to come. Genesis 22:17-18 indicates that the offspring of Abraham will spread through the world and that all people will be blessed by Abraham’s offspring (cf. Gn 12:3). The Qur’an first indicates blessings similar to Genesis in Surah 37:108 as “(this blessing) for him among generations to come in.” In addition to Abraham’s future blessing, Allah promises him a son, Isaac, in Surah 37:112. The

Pickthal translation shows the coming birth of Isaac as a result of Abraham's test, "And We gave him tidings of the birth of Isaac, a Prophet of the Righteous" (S 37:112).

Besides the content of biblical account, the Qur'an contains additional details of the test of Abraham; especially the response of the son is exclusively presented. In the Bible Isaac asked a simple observational question concerning the lack of a sacrifice animal, "The fire and the wood are here...but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gn 22:7). There is no immediate indication of Isaac's faith in God as compared to the Qur'anic account of the unidentified son. Surah 37:102 describes the faith of the son: "O my father! do as thou art commanded: thou will find me if Allah so wills one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

The unidentified son in the Qur'anic story is generally identified as Ishmael. Because the promise of the birth of Isaac is clearly written in the text as a result of the test (S 37:112), the unidentified son is most likely considered to be Ishmael in the Qur'an. However, according to the context of Abraham's requests, the son can be interpreted as Isaac.

In Surah 37:100 Abraham requests a son: "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous (son)." This request is answered in Surah 37:113 where it indicates both Abraham and Isaac. There is no mentioning of Ishmael who was supposed to deserve the blessing due to his faith in God when he faced the offering as: "We blessed him and Isaac: but of their progeny are (some) that do right and (some) that obviously do wrong to their own souls" (S 37:113). Furthermore, the anonymous expression of the son in the actual text as well as the Semitic expression of the narrative provides room to interpret the unidentified son as Isaac. Surah 37:112 indicates Abraham and Isaac, followed by God's blessing upon them in Surah 37:113, "We blessed him and Isaac." Here once again, "him" is identified as Abraham, not Ishmael,

due to the consecutive nature of narrative. This interpretation is supported by the biblical text where it reads, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac” (Gn 22:2). However, against the argument that Isaac was the only son of Abraham, Ali (1989:1150) expresses the Islamic view: “Ismail was therefore 14 years older than Isaac. During his first 14 years Ismail was the *only* son of Abraham; at no time was Isaac the *only* son of Abraham. Yet, in speaking of the sacrifice, the Old Testament says (Gen. xxii. 2): ‘And He said, Take now thy son, thine *only* son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah.’” Of course, at the time of the test, the first born son of Abraham (Ishmael) was on the scene. However, for Yahweh, the one who initiated the test, the child of Sarah, Isaac is the only legitimate son as God had promised a son to her to establish his covenant with Isaac. Genesis 17:21 reads, “But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” As for the blessing of Ishmael, the Bible indicates that “he will be the father of twelve rulers and I will make him into a great nation” (Gn 17:20).

However, it is orthodox to treat the unidentified son as Ishmael in Islam (Shafi 2003:466).⁵⁶ The argument is that because of the faith of Ishmael, the Christian and Jewish peoples are blessed (S 37:113); the blessing is not a result of Isaac’s obedience in being tied upon the altar. Ishmael, as a young man, was able to refuse his father with his physical strength, yet he submitted to God’s will as in Surah 37:103: “So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah) and He had laid Him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice).” Note that here, both Abraham and Ishmael are being laid upon the altar voluntarily. They were being self-sacrifices in reference to Surah 22:37: “It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah:

⁵⁶ Shafi (2003:466) also listed that there are many Islamic commentators and historians who interpreted the unidentified son as Isaac.

it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you that ye may glorify Allah for His guidance to you: and proclaim the Good News to all who do right.”

Then, the question remains as to why theological controversy exists between Christians and Muslims about the son of Abraham. Why the anonymous reference to the son in the Qur’anic text? To make it clear in the text, as it is in the biblical text, the editor of the Qur’an could insert the name of Ishmael without being obligated to change the text. Furthermore, it is not unusual to use the name Ishmael together with Abraham in the Qur’anic narrative. In fact, whenever the father and the son, Ishmael, appear in a story in the Qur’an, both names are clearly written in the text (S 2:127, 136, 140; 3:84; 4:163). The question of anonymous reference to Ishmael will remain with the question of the redactor’s work; otherwise there will be an uprising of conflict between the interpretation of the texts of the Bible and the Qur’an.

As both texts indicate that the test came from God (Ex 20:2; Dt 8:2; S 3:154; 34:21), another interpretative question refers to the degree of God’s involvement in the test. The overall trait of the Qur’anic account is God’s narration of Abraham’s test, while the biblical account is a direct conversation between God and Abraham with the narrator’s introduction serving as the prelude to the story. Qur’anic Abraham receives instruction for the test through a vision (S 37:112), the normal method for God’s revelation in the Qur’an (S 42:51). In this way of revelation, God possibly maintains his ontological transcendent state from Abraham, compared to the immanent-transcendent state in the biblical account of Abraham, which is discussed below. Furthermore, God called out, (*wa- naadaynaa -hu*), ransomed the son with “a momentous sacrifice” (*wa- fadaynaa -hu bi- dhibh. caz.em*) and rewarded Abraham with blessings. These are the words of a narrative that does not hint at any nuances of either the

transcendence or immanence of God in the process. In fact, it was the angel *Jibrā'il* who brought a ram before Abraham (Shafi 2003:466). Thus the Qur'anic account of Abraham's test maintains the absolute transcendence of God from Abraham and the son.

Unlike the Qur'anic account, the Bible uses the language of transcendence where God is directly involved in the narrative. Genesis 22:11 says "But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven." Here the term "the angel of the LORD" is inter-changeably used to refer to the image of the invisible God in the Old Testament (Gn 16:7, 9, 13; 22:11, 12; 31:11, 13; Ex 3:2, 6, 14).⁵⁷ The term, "angel of the LORD" prevents direct human encounter with God. The Old Testament uses this term to indicate God's appearance to humans such as in Abraham's case in Genesis 18 as well as in Genesis 16 where Hagar saw the angel of the LORD (Gn 16:7, 9, 11). Hagar later says, "She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'" (Gn 16:13). The clause "I have now seen the One who sees me" (הִנֵּנִי הִלֵּמְתִי אַחֲרַי רְאִי) literally meant "Even here have I looked behind my beholder?" Wenham (1994:11) comments that "The Hebrew of this half-verse has caused much perplexity and prompted many emendations." However, the phrase "looked behind" is the same expression of God's granting Moses to see his back (Ex 33:23) which is dealt with in section 4.4.5.3. The expression here is, then, that Abraham saw and perceived the presence of God. This revelation of God through "the angel of the LORD" is presented in the Old Testament in order to maintain his transcendence from man while God is immanent with Abraham as in the case of Moses (Ex 33).

⁵⁷ Erickson (1985:443) and Grudem (1994:401) confirm the use of the phrase "the angel of the LORD" is inter-changeably used to refer to the image of the invisible God.

Furthermore, “calling out of heaven” is the typical method for maintaining the transcendence of God in the Bible. In Genesis 22:11 and 15, “the angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven.” When Israelites recall this incident, they repeat God’s revelation as: “You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good” (Neh 9:13). Heaven is the dwelling place or the abode of God in both the Old and New Testament; from there God looks down on humanity, hears their cry and reaches out to his subjects (Johnston 2000:542). Making a physical gap between heaven and earth, the phrase “calling out of heaven” is a convincing indication of divine transcendence in the context of direct communication with Abraham (Gn 22:11, 15) and Hagar (Gn 21:17) as well as in Deuteronomy 4:36, Nehemiah 9:27-28, and Revelation 18:4. Consequently, maintaining his transcendence in the language of “the angel of the LORD” and speaking from heaven, God was present in the scene of the test on the mountain. From an ontological understanding of Abraham’s perspective of him, God was present at the scene of the sacrifice and directly interfered with the sequence of Abraham’s sacrifice.

The most important fact of God’s involvement in the story is how Abraham understood the presence of God. Abraham, when asked by Isaac, says God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering in Genesis 22:8. Was he aware that God would actually replace Isaac with a lamb or was this the language of deceiving his son? Whatever the meaning of “God will provide,” the text was fulfilled as God provided a ram trapped in a thicket (Gn 22:13).

In response to God’s providence of a sacrificial ram, Genesis 22:14 indicates: “So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided’” (וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שְׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר)

(יְהוָה יִרְאֶה). Literally the text means “and Abraham called the name of that place ‘God will see (יְהוָה יִרְאֶה),’ which it is said today on a (the) mount, ‘God will be seen (יְהוָה יִרְאֶה).” In this literal translation and other traditional English translations (NIV, KJV, ASV), there are at least two major issues in the exegetical arguments; the application of the word ‘to see’ (רָאָה) and the state of the noun “(on) the mountain” (בְּהַר).

The Hebrew word רָאָה (to see) is used twice in Genesis 24:14. The first occurrence appears as a reference to the place where the test took place. It is used in NIV as, “The LORD will provide [יִרְאֶה].” The Hebrew word for “will provide” is יִרְאֶה which literally means “he will see.” In the second half of the verse the word רָאָה is used in a passive nuance as “...it will be provided [יִרְאֶה].” Once again, the literal translation means “he will be seen.” In Genesis 22:8, Abraham uses the word to answer for the provision of the sacrifice as “God himself will provide [יִרְאֶה] the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Here the Hebrew word יִרְאֶה means “he will see” as in verse 22.

Wenham (1994:111) comments on the verb רָאָה toward God’s appearance before Abraham:

Abraham named the mountain. As already noted, the name Moriyyah (v2) is here alluded to in the name of the mountain (יְהוָה יִרְאֶה *Yahweh yireh*) “In the mount of the LORD he may be seen.” Here the same root, רָאָה “see, provide,” is used in the niphal, which is regularly used of the LORD appearing to men (cf. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1), thus making a link backward with Abraham’s past experience and forward to Israel’s future experiences on the mountain of God (Ex 3:1-2; Lv 9:4, 6, etc.).

According to Wenham's definition of the root word ראה (see, provide), the idiom, "he will see" (יִרְאֶה) could mean "he will provide." In the context of Abraham's answer to Isaac's question concerning the absence of a sacrificial animal (Gn 22:8), the Hebrew word can be translated to indicate God's provision of the lamb. Genesis 22:8 reads, "Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide [יִרְאֶה] the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'" However, it is not clear whether Abraham trusted that God would replace Isaac with a lamb, or Abraham understood God's command literally (sacrificing Isaac). In either way, Abraham's answer is meant to see God's sovereignty. If Abraham meant to emphasise the sovereignty of God, the phrase could be translated in the literal sense of the word, "to see" throughout Genesis 22.

Other than the context of Genesis 22, the word רָאָה is not translated into "to provide" in the Old Testament. The consonant value of "he will provide" (יִרְאֶה) can mean either the simple (qal) or passive (niph'al) future of the verb "to see." Furthermore, it can be the feminine singular noun "fear," or the simple past tense (qal perfect) of "to fear." Of the seventy one uses of the same consonant value (יִרְאֶה), eleven times are used in connection with the word "fear" and the other fifty seven are used either as "see," "regard," "look," or "appear." Only in Genesis 22 is the word translated three times with the nuances of "provision."⁵⁸ Then, due to the uncommon use of the word ראה in the sense of provision, exegetes should also consider the meaning of the word apart from the traditional translation, "provide."

So far, three major considerations have been discussed on the meaning of the word יִרְאֶה: (1) the above facts of word usage in the Old Testament, (2) Abraham's possible expectation of the lack of any substitute for Isaac, and (3) an expression of submission to God's will: "God

⁵⁸ The statistics are produced by the research tool in a computer software, *BibleWorks* (Version 7.0).

will see” and the normal use of the word “see.” The LXX translation may confirm the above discussion as well as the obvious understanding of Genesis 22:14 as: “καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Ἀβραὰμ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου κύριος εἶδεν [he had seen] ἵνα εἴπωσιν σήμερον ἐν τῷ ὄρει κύριος ὤφθη [he was seen].” Brenton’s LXX translation of Genesis 22:14 indicates the perceptible appearance of God: “And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord hath seen; that they might say to-day, In the mount the Lord was seen.” In this verse as well as in Genesis 22:8 the Hebrew word for “provide” (יִרְאֶה) was translated with ὁράω (to see, observe), in the aorist active which indicates that the appearance of God took place in the past, before the time when the narrative took place (Gn 2:14). In Genesis 22:8 the Greek word ὁράω is in the future tense which indicates a continuation of God’s immanence.

The second exegetical issue comes from the Hebrew vowel pointing to the word בְּהָרַיִם. It is noteworthy to see how the Hebrew vowel pointing can change the meaning of the text as we have already seen with the word יִרְאֶה. Likewise, English translations of the second part of Genesis 22:14 have not been the same. For example, recent English translations like the NIV, NAU, and NRS translate it as “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” The older KJV translates it as “In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.” The modern Jewish translation of Tanakh reads “On the mount of the LORD there is vision.” All these translations treat the Hebrew word בְּהָרַיִם (on/in a mountain) as in a construct state with the LORD (יְהוָה). Thus it is translated as “on the mountain of the LORD.” In Hebrew, masculine singular nouns do not have different forms of absolute or construct states. Therefore the word בְּהָרַיִם can be either in the absolute or construct form. If it is in the absolute state the translation would be “in the mountain, the LORD will be seen.” However, modern English translations follow the Masorites’ vowel pointing, which was settled at a time around A.D. 700

(Würthwein 1995:21). In this vowel pointing of the Hebrew and translation, God's appearance on the mountain is diminished as the phrase "it will be seen/provided" would refer to the lamb in the context.

However, in the original vowelless Hebrew text, it is possible to read such as **בְּהָר** (in a mountain) or **בְּהָרָה** (in the mountain). In later cases, the translation should be "on the mountain, the LORD will be provided," or more likely "on the mountain, the LORD will be seen." This is exactly how the LXX and YLT⁵⁹ translate it. The literal translation of YLT is "in the mount, Jehovah doth provide." And LXE⁶⁰ reads "In the mount the Lord was seen [ἐν τῷ ὄρει κύριος ὤφθη]." The translator of LXX understands the vowelless word **בהר** as "the mountain" and thus provides room to interpret the text in the context of God's appearance before Abraham.

According to the alternative literal translation of the vowelless text and the LXX, Abraham may understand and perceive the presence of God on the mountain when God interferes with the sacrifice of Isaac. The statement, "The LORD will see...the LORD will be seen" (**יְהוָה יִרְאֶה...יְהוָה יִרְאֶה**) may have been Abraham's understanding and his statement of perceiving the presence of God. This is a solitary account of the Bible as the Qur'an does not indicate any similar incident in the account of Abraham's test. The Qur'an does provide for God's involvement in the test of Abraham by ransoming "him with a momentous sacrifice" (S 37:109). The ransoming process was preceded by God's interference. Surah 37:104 reads,

⁵⁹ YLT (Young's Literal Translation, [1862]1898).

⁶⁰ LXE (LXX English Translation, Brenton).

“We called out to him ‘O Abraham!’ [*wa- naadaynaa -hu 'an yaa 'ibraahem*].” This account of God’s calling out to stop the sacrifice and providing the ransom are identical with biblical account. Nevertheless, the Qur’anic account does not provide the location of God’s calling as it does in the Bible.

4.3.5 Conclusion

Both the Qur’an and the Bible give Abraham the title of “friend of God.” The title brings the questions of the manner of fellowship Abraham had with God to be qualified “friend of God.” The Qur’an indicates the friendship as mere faithfulness to God resulting no enmity toward God, while the Bible indicates the personal relationship of mutual bonds between two parties. In the incident of the guests of Abraham, the Qur’an avoids God’s presence in the scene by excluding the third guest which is recounted in the biblical story as the appearance of God before Abraham. The Qur’an maintains the transcendence of God in the account of Abraham. The biblical accounts of Abraham reflect an immanent God, who maintains his transcendent state through a perceivable appearance such as “the third guest” and “the angel of the LORD.” This aspect of God’s perceivable appearance is known in the biblical accounts of Abraham’s guests and test, as well as throughout the Old Testament but especially in Exodus. Similarly to the testing of Abraham, God appeared on the Mountain of Sinai to Moses and his people, who perceived his presence. Was there the same kind as Abraham’s ontological understanding of God’s appearance among Moses and his people? The answer will clarify and confirm any unanswered question of God’s appearance to Abraham.

4.4 TRANSCENDENT GOD AND MOSES

4.4.1 Introduction

God's relationship with his people is expressed extensively in the incidents surrounding the Exodus of the Israelites from the Egypt. The main figure of the Exodus is Moses whom the Qur'an speaks of mostly as among the prophets. The details of Moses' life are written about to a greater extent than any other prophet's life even compared to the biblical Moses. Concerning Moses in the Old Testament Wessner (2002:109) says, "Throughout the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps no other biblical character is portrayed as being more intimate with God than Moses, the unequalled leader of the ancient Israelites." The general outline of the life of Moses in Surah 28 closely traces the account in Exodus 1 to 15.

The narrative of Moses begins with the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt (Ex 1; S 28:1-6). The birth of Moses and his adaptation to Pharaoh's family appears in both the Bible and the Qur'an with his foster parent being the wife of Pharaoh in the Qur'an (S 28:7-13; 20:37-40) and the daughter of Pharaoh in the Bible (Ex 2:10). This story is followed by Moses' killing of an Egyptian (Ex 2:12; S 28:14-21; 20:40; 26:18-20) which resulted in his exile in Midian (Madyan). In Midian, Moses first helped two women of an unnamed father in the Qur'an while the Bible identified him as Reuel or Jethro (S 28:22-28; Ex 2:15-18). The Qur'an provides details of the marriage between Moses and Zipporah with a pact of service for eight or ten years while the Bible indicates the consummation of marriage and the birth of the son Gershom (S 28:27; Ex 2:21-22).

Moses' encounter with the burning bush is disclosed in both the Bible and the Qur'an (Ex 3:1-4, 17; S 28:29-35; 20:9-23) as well as the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh (Ex 5—12; S 28:36-39; 20:24-36; 7:104-123; 10:75-82; 17:101-102; 20:49-60; 11:96-99; 40:24). The ten plagues against the Egyptians in Exodus 7 to 12 correspond with the nine signs of Moses in Surah 7:133 and 17:101. However the "institution of the Passover, the sacrifice of the firstborn, and other details are not dealt with in the Koran, evidently because Mohammad did not feel they were important" (Busse 1998:97).

The Exodus and inundation of Egyptians into the sea (Ex 12—14; S 28:40-42), worship of the golden calf (Ex 32; S 7:148-153; 20:83-98), the company of Korah (Karun) (Nm 16:32-35; S 28:76-82; 29:39), and the wanderings in the desert, water from a rock and the feeding of quails (Nm 10—22; S 7:154-160; 20:80-81) are shown in both Scriptures. The story of Korah in the Qur'an has varied from the Bible with additional biblical figures, Haman, and the Haman's tower that refer to the tower of Babel in the Bible (Gn 11:1-9; S 28:38).

The Decalogue appears in Exodus 20 while the Qur'an briefly mentions it in many places with allusions to the Decalogue of the Bible (S 17; S 7:142-145; 6:151; 25:63-72; 16:90-94; 23:2-8). However, the third commandment is not recounted in the Qur'an. The story of sending out scouts and the refusal to enter the Holy Land for fear of the giants is indicated in Number 13 to 14 and Surah 5:23-26.

In their accounts of the Exodus, both the Qur'an and the Bible testify the presence of God and his relationship with Moses and Israel in a similar way. The calling of Moses from the mystic fire and on Mount Sinai, the pillar of cloud and the Ark of the Covenant are mentioned in both the Qur'an and the Bible. This section will concern itself with an examination of the

divine-human relationship depicted in both Scriptures, in particular with the influence of pre-understanding of biblical knowledge in the process of revelation of the Qur'an as well as the issue of biblical theophany. In the Old Testament, there are many appearances of God before a human audience. In the case of Moses, "the term 'theophany' is used here not in its figurative sense of 'encounter with the divine,' but, in keeping with the Greek *faínein*, 'to appear,' it [theophany] implies the presence of a visual component in addition to verbal interaction" (Savran 2003:120). As Savran says, there will be a concern of Moses' and people's understanding of God's presence with reference to the "visual component" in both Scriptures.

4.4.2 Moses and the mystic fire

4.4.2.1 Introduction

The call narrative of Moses appeared in Exodus 3:1—4:17, Surah 20:10-24, 27:7-14, and 28:29-35 introduces Moses as a mediator between God and people (Den Hertog 2002:227). In the Exodus account Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert when he encountered the burning bush (Ex 3:1). On the other hand, the Qur'anic Moses was returning to Egypt after fulfilling his marriage vow of serving his father-in-law for ten years when he saw the burning bush (S 28:29). The basic outline of the Qur'anic account of the burning bush and Moses' calling follows that of the Bible. However, the Qur'an does not have the account of God's instruction to Moses concerning his identity and specific instructions on dealing with the elders of Israel. The major identical accounts are Moses' perceiving and his approaching the fire (Ex 3:3; S 20:11; 27:8; 28:30), hearing the voice from the fire (Ex 3:4; S 20:11-12; 27:8; 28:30), the lordship announcement (Ex 3:6, S 27:9; 28:30),

homage to the holy ground (Ex 3:6; 20:12; 27:8; 28:30), God's commission to Moses (Ex 3:10; S 20:13), rod and white-hand for the sign of Moses (Ex 4:2-6; S 20:17-22; 27:10-12; 28:31), and Aaron being the helper to Moses (4:15-16; 20:29-36; 28:43).

From the above identical elements of the account of the burning bush, God's appearance before Moses seems to play an important role in both the Qur'an and the Bible. The context of the burning bush and the conversation between God and Moses should reflect either God's transcendence or immanence. The texts are as following:

Exodus 3:1-6 ¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Surah 20:10-13 ¹⁰Behold he saw a fire: so he said to his family "Tarry ye; I perceive a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand there from or find some guidance at the fire." ¹¹But when he came to the fire a voice was

heard: “O Moses! ¹²Verily I am thy Lord! Therefore (in My presence) put off thy shoes: thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa. ¹³I have chosen thee: listen then to the inspiration (sent to thee).”

Surah 27:7-9 ⁷Behold! Moses said to his family: “I perceive a fire; soon will I bring you from there some information or I will bring you a burning brand to light our fuel that ye may warm yourselves.” ⁸But when he came to the (Fire) a voice was heard: “Blessed are those in the Fire and those around: and Glory to Allah the Lord of the Worlds! ⁹O Moses! verily I am Allah the Exalted in Might the Wise!...

Surah 28:29-30 ²⁹Now when Moses had fulfilled the term and was travelling with his family he perceived a fire in the direction of Mount Tur. He said to his family: “Tarry ye; I perceive a fire; I hope to bring you from there some information or a burning firebrand that ye may warm yourselves.” ³⁰But when he came to the (Fire) a voice was heard from the right bank of the valley from a tree in hallowed ground: “O Moses! verily I am Allah the Lord of the Worlds...

As seen from the above list of the verses, the accounts of Moses’ encounter with the burning bush in the Qur’an and the Bible contain minor differences. Both accounts identify the location as a mountain region (Mount Horeb and Tur). Moses and God are the main figures of the story and the fire is important in both stories. However, a few details have been observed as different. The following is a brief comparison of the two accounts of Moses’ encounter with the burning bush.



Exodus 3

Surah 20, 27, 28

v.1	Introduction & location at Mt. Horeb, Mt of God	20:9; 28:29	Introduction & location at Mt Tur
v.2	Angel of the LORD appeared and Moses misunderstood it as fire & said,	20:10; 27:7; 28:29b	He saw a fire & went to get a fire and direction
v.3	“I will go over to investigate ...”		
v.4	God saw and called Moses & Moses answered	20:11; 27:8; 28:30a	A voice was heard
v.5	“Do not come closer; take off your sandals”	20:12; 27:9; 28:30b	“I am your Lord (Allah) & take off your shoes. You are in a sacred valley Tuwa (right bank of the valley).”
v.6	“I am the God of your father . . .”		
	Moses was afraid to look at God		
v.7-9	God’s recognition of Israel’s suffering in Egypt		
v.10	“I am sending you to Pharaoh”	20:13	“I have chosen thee”

From the above lists, it is evident that Moses’ perception of the fire is somewhat different. The Qur’an indicates that when Moses first saw the fire, he understood it as actual fire. Therefore, Moses headed toward the fire to get a firebrand for his family, as well as direction about the surrounding area (S 20:10; 27:7-14; 28:29ff.). In the biblical account, Moses saw the angel of the Lord, who appeared in flames of fire, and mistook it for an actual fire that does not burn the bush. So Moses approached the fire in order to investigate the strange sight (Ex 3:3). When Moses got near the fire, there came an announcement to him.

In the Bible, the origin of the calling of Moses is “from within the bush” while the Qur’an indicates “a voice was heard.” Exodus 3:4 states that the calling is from God as “God called

to him [Moses]” and the following narrative between God and Moses indicates a direct conversation between the two. However, the Qur’an is unclear as to how God speaks to Moses as the voice was heard. The origin of the voice and the mode of God’s speaking to Moses will determine the nature of the presence of God with Moses at the burning bush. Furthermore, the nature of the fire and Moses’ understanding of fire could shed light on the metaphysical transcendence and immanence of God in this account.

It is arresting and helpful to note that the background of Moses’ presence in the desert is different in the Qur’an and the Bible. Exodus 3:1 indicates that Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law. He led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb⁶¹ when he encountered the fire. It seems that Moses was alone in tending the sheep since the Exodus account does not indicate any other person in the context. In Surah 28:26-29 Moses was contracted to work for minimum of eight years, or if he preferred, for ten years as a bride price. When Moses fulfilled the term he was travelling near Mount Tur at the time of his encounter with the fire (S 28:29). Johns (1990:162) concludes that the purpose of his travelling with family was due to homesickness and thus he was returning to Egypt. He provides the purpose of ten years of exile, with which biblical scholars readily agree, as “to give him the wide experience of life he needed to prepare him for his task and to preach his message effectively” (Johns 1990:163).

⁶¹ Horeb is called the mountain of God which is Mount Sinai in the Old Testament. In the Qur’an, Mount Sinai is referred to with different Arabic terms, Mount Tur, Mount Tabari, Jabal Musa. The sacred valley Tuwa in Surah 20:12 also refers to the valley just below Mount Sinai.

4.4.2.2 The mystic fire

The Qur'anic Moses simply stated that he perceived a fire and assumed that there were some local people who could provide him information about the surrounding area and a firebrand for his family. The biblical Moses saw the unnatural phenomenon of fire, a fire which did not consume the bush. Then he went over to investigate why the bush does not burn up. Qur'an commentator Ali (1989:766) asserts that Moses first perceives the fire as a real fire (*naar*) and then discovers that the fire is the glory of God. Despite the fact that the word *naar* refers to physical fire, Ali (1989:768) interpreted the fire as a sign of the glory of God, or a shining divine light (*nuur*) such as Moses' hand, which turns white (S 20:22). The Arabic word for "fire" is feminine (*naar*) and refers to physical fire. It carries the Qur'anic concept of hell, the opposite of *janna*, heaven in Surah 2:81-82 (Nevo 2002:144). The Qur'an uses a masculine word *nuur* (fire) to indicate a divine attribute of "light." This usage of the two words for fire also appears in the biblical use of words for fire.

In Old Testament Hebrew, the words נֵר and נֹר are cognitive to the Arabic words for fire, *naar* and *nuur*. The Hebrew נֵר (*ner*) is used forty-four times and it can always translate as a light-producing lamp (Kohlenberger III 1998:110). Another word for fire comes from the Aramaic portion of the Old Testament. The Aramaic word for light, נֹר (*nuur*) is only used in Daniel where it occurs thirteen times with the article. In the definite status of light, it is always used as consuming fire while the other four times it is used without an article. From these four times, thrice in Daniel 7:9-10, the word נֹר describes non-consuming fire that indicates the presence of God and thus confirming the usage of the Arabic words.

Fire in the Old Testament has three major usages (Neusner 1996:227). First, the most common reference to fire in the Old Testament is a destructive fire (Gn 19:24; Nm 11:1; 21:28; 26:10; Neh 1:3; etc.). The second use of fire as purification is seen when Isaiah's lips are purified when touched with a burning coal (Is 6:6-7). The third usage of fire refers to God's involvement in this world as "the divine world as fire" where fire is associated with the presence of God such as the pillar of fire (Ex 14:24) and God's chariot of Ezekiel's vision. Sommer (2001:61) reminds us that a fire that came "from God's presence (יְהוָה מִלְּפָנָיו)" (Lv 10:2, cf. 9:24) incinerated Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu during the inaugural ceremonies of the tabernacle's dedication as they offered unauthorised fire before Yahweh. This shows that the fire is a token of divine presence and a reminder of divine unpredictability. Furthermore, the continual presence of God is symbolised by the ever-burning fire on the altar (Lv 6:12-13). In the case of the burning bush where the fire is continuously lit but does not consume the bush, the fire indicates God's continuing presence (Neusner 1996:227). However, in spite of God's presence in the proximity of the bush, Moses could not approach the fire, for the fire is in the third category, "the divine world as fire" which is also "unapproachable holiness."⁶²

4.4.2.3 The holy ground

The "unapproachable holiness" is further reflected in both Scriptures with reference to taking off Moses' shoes and an indication of the place being holy ground. In the biblical account, it is preceded by another of God's commands to Moses: "Do not come any closer [אַל-תִּקְרַב, אֱלֹהִים], God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:5). The root word for "come closer" (קָרַב) refers to both spatial as well as temporal

⁶² Ross (1985:56) also indicated the fire thus: "Fire represents the consuming, cleansing zeal of Yahweh as well as His unapproachable holiness, which are interrelated."

proximity. Most commonly, it is used in a spatial sense to denote physical proximity describing the divine-human relationship (Lemke 1981:542). Durham (1987:31) describes human approach to the presence of God this way: “the verb forbidding too close an approach by Moses, קרב ‘approach,’ is frequently used in the OT as a technical term to describe an approach to the Presence of God in worship, or to seek an oracle.” The dual usage of קרב is further supported by the derived form of the word, קָרַב. The adjective form of the word *qarob* [קָרֵב or קָרֵב] occurs seventy seven times in the Old Testament (Kohlenberger III & Swanson 1998:1427). An examination of these occurrences reveals that the word is used in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Furthermore, it refers to both spatial as well as temporal proximity. Most commonly the adjective is used in a spatial sense to denote physical proximity such as in Genesis 19:20, where Lot says: “Look, here is a town near [קָרֵבָה, fs] enough to run to.” In the context of Exodus 3, it is evident that the word is used to indicate Moses’ physical proximity to God. The temporal use of the word is eliminated due to the narrative which involves the physical movement of Moses instead of time reference. Then, as Den Hertog (2002:217) infers, the word is used in this context for the purpose of avoiding the idea that the Lord is immediately recognisable and to maintain God’s distance from Moses.

In the sequence of the account of the burning bush, the command to take off his shoes is immediately followed by the command, “Do not come any closer.” In the biblical and Semitic cultural context it was a mark of respect and honour to take off one’s shoes before someone or someplace (Cragg 1959:26). Besides this occurrence with Moses (Ex 3:5; Ac 7:33), only Joshua 5:15 indicates the taking off the shoes because of holy ground. “The commander of the LORD's army replied, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so” (Jos 5:15). The commander of the LORD is identified as God and Joshua’s action is seen as paying respect to God (Campbell 1985:340; Jos 6:2).

Just as in Joshua's case, Exodus 3:5 says, "Take off your sandals, for [כִּי] the place where you are standing is holy ground [אֲדָמַת־קֹדֶשׁ]." Here, the reason for taking shoes off is followed by the causal conjunction כִּי which is translated as "for" or "because of." The clause followed by the conjunction may indicate God's presence in the story, designating the location as "holy ground" due to the existence of God's presence.

In the Old Testament holy ground is a sign and place where God's presence existed. In Deuteronomy 23:14, God, being the protector of Israel, is portrayed as moving about (מְהַלֵּךְ) in the camp of Israel in the desert. The Hebrew word used to indicate God's movement is the intensive-reflexive form (*hithpael*) of verb, הִלֵּךְ (to walk), which implies God intensively moves himself around. This intensive movement of God is an indication of God's immanence among the people of Israel. The condition of God's presence is indicated in the second half of the verse as, "Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you" (Dt 23:14b). The holiness of the camp is the condition to be met by the people in order to accommodate Yahweh as the transcendent God, while the immanence of God is reflected through his presence with Israel.

Moses acknowledges that God is with him when he is on holy ground and heard God's self-declaration of his identify as the God of his ancestor. Exodus 3:6 indicates "Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God [אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים]." It is not surprising to see the article הַ with the plural noun אֱלֹהִים (God or gods) as it appears more than 366 times in the Old Testament. The same noun occurs without the article about 680 times (*BibleWorks* 2007: (הַאֱלֹהִים)). The function of the article attached to the word "God" could be interpreted in a couple of ways. It could be an anaphoric treatment in which the article functions equivalent to a weak demonstrative (Joüon 1993:507). Moses is referring back to Exodus 3:5 where God

identified himself as the God of Moses' ancestor. Another option is to understand the article as a distinctive reference (Williams 1976:19) referring to God as "true God" as in 1 Kings 18:39 (cf. the river, הַיַּרְדֵּן, in Genesis 31:21 also translated as "the *Euphrates* River" in NAU). Moses might understand God as the one true and real God who spoke and appeared before him. Here, the focus is God's spatial appearance before Moses. Either way of understanding the article indicates God's presence with Moses. Moses' understanding of God at this point in the story indicates the ontological presence of God with him. This is a clear sign that Moses now perceives that the holy ground is where the presence of God existed. Furthermore, without a doubt, he perceives the burning bush as the physical appearance of God. Niehaus (1995:187) supports this view by saying Moses may have seen an "angelic" appearance of God's fiery theophany. If so, from the beginning, Moses saw non-physical fire and may have perceived it as the appearance of the Lord as noted by the way he reacted in Exodus 3:6, where "Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God."

The Qur'anic account indicates that the place is holy ground. Surah 20:12 renders the reason, "Verily I am thy Lord! Therefore (in My presence) put off thy shoes: thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa." In this verse the reason for taking off Moses' shoes is that he is in the sacred valley of Tuwa.⁶³ However, it is not clear why the valley of Tuwa is holy ground. The translation in the parenthesis "in My presence" would refer to God's presence, yet the original Arabic does not indicate it; the parenthesis is the translator's interpretation, which was added to the text.

⁶³ Asad translation (1986-1999) indicates the "Tuwa" as twice emphasizing the holiness of the ground as, "thou art in the twice-hallowed valley."

Two other Qur’anic verses concerning Moses may show the reason for Moses’ taking his shoes off. In Surah 28:30 the voice was heard from “the right bank of the valley” and Surah 19:52 reads, “We called him from the right side of Mount (Sinai).” In Islamic thought, “the right side” can be interpreted in the literal manner as well as in the figurative sense which refers to blessed or sacred ground (Ali 1989:755). It is difficult to distinguish whether the presence of God is indicated by the phrase “holy ground” or “right side” in the Qur’anic account, due to the absence of the direct appearance of God before Moses. However, the location of the origin of the voice may clarify the presence of God before Moses in both the biblical and Qur’anic accounts.

4.4.2.4 Origin of the voice

Another indication of the presence of God in the bush is the origin of the voice of God. In the Qur’an, as in the Bible, it seems that God is the one who addresses Moses. Yet, the origin of the voice may be other than God. Surah 27:8 says, “But when he [Moses] came to the (fire), a voice was heard: ‘Blessed are those in the fire and those around: and glory to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.’” In this verse, a few differences from the Bible are observed. Initially, the clause “a voice was heard” does not correspond with the biblical account, “God called to him from within the bush” (Ex 3:4). The exact location of the source of the voice is not indicated in the Qur’anic account. The biblical location of the voice is “from within” (מִתּוֹךְ) the bush.

The exegetical problem here is that if the voice is interpreted as being God’s and as coming from the bush, then the phrase “glory to Allah” makes Allah a self-glorifying God. Furthermore, if the voice originated from God, God, being incarnated into fire, is absolutely against the concept of *Tawid*, the oneness of Allah (Shafi 2005c:573). Tradition indicates the

fire may have been God's curtain which separates God from his subject during a revelation process as, "His curtain is the fire or His curtain is the light" (Usmani 2002b:1661). Furthermore, there are indications that a multitude is present at the scene, as the text explains "those in the fires and those around." Thus, there is a possibility that the voice originated from one of "those," not from God. Usmani (2002b:1661) indicates that those around the fire are either the angels or Moses himself. Shafi (2005c:572) presents different commentators' views of who was inside the fire and around it. They are either Moses or angels in opposing explanations. Thus it is most likely that the voice originated from the angels.

Moreover, the verb forms of "call" used in the Bible and the Qur'an communicate different implications about the origin of the calling. In the Bible, it is God who calls out to Moses (וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה). The voice of the verb (וַיִּקְרָא) here is in the active form, which shows that God is the active agent in the calling. On the other hand, the Qur'an uses a passive voice (*nudiya*), which indicates that God (Allah) received the action.

Ali (1989:939) translates the verb *nidiya* as "a voice was heard." However, the actual word means, as Pickthall translates, "He [Allah] was called," which is a perfect passive of *nada* (to call, proclaim). It is not Allah who speaks actively, but he receives the action of calling passively. This answers the question: "whose voice is this?" This passive form of the verb conveys that the voice was the sound of angels proclaiming the glory of God from the midst of the fire. By using the passive form of the verb *nada*, the Qur'an again protects the principle of the total transcendence of God. In the Bible, there are similar cases of protecting the transcendence of God by using the passive voice. In Daniel 4:28 (Eng. 4:31) God's voice came from heaven (קָל מִן־שָׁמַיִם נָפַל) to reveal judgment to the king Nebuchadnezzar. The Aramaic word נָפַל is active (peal) perfect of "to fall down" which indicated that God's voice

originated from the heaven. Also, in the New Testament, 2 Peter 1:17 uses a passive verb in the passage, “the voice [of God] conveyed (φωνῆς ἐνεχθείσης) to him by the Majestic Glory,” protects the transcendence of God by avoiding the idea that God himself speaks directly (cf. Ex 20:22, “I [God] have spoken to you from heaven”).

Another key interpretative element is how God communicates in the Qur’an. God only communicates with man through inspiration, behind a veil, or by sending messengers (S 42:51; 16:2). Surah 42:51 confirms, “It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with Allah’s permission, what Allah wills: for he is most high, most wise.” Surah 20:77 and 26:52 indicate that God’s communication to Moses is through inspiration. Surah 20:77 reads, “We sent an inspiration to Moses.” As the word “sent” implies that an angel carries the message, the voice heard in Surah 27:8 is the context which should be understood with Moses’ inspiration through the angel who is not accountable by name. Surah 20:25 shows that Moses is speaking to God in a similar way as in the biblical account, for it says, “(Moses) said: ‘O my Lord! Expand me my breast.’” The word for “Lord” is *rabb*, which generally refers to God. However, the word *rabb* is used to address the angel who appears to Mary (S 3:47). Furthermore, the method of the revelation of the Qur’an through the angel (S 42:51) indicates the word *rabb* refers to an angel, who is speaking or giving inspiration to Moses in the context. Thus the Islamic interpretation of the burning bush eliminates a direct confrontation of God with Moses, while the biblical account confirms that God is manifested in a fiery glory before Moses, a manifestation of God that Moses first misunderstands as an angelic appearance in the burning bush.

4.4.2.5 God's name and Moses

Another interpretative observation comes from the abrupt transition from the LORD (יהוה) to God (אֱלֹהִים). Exodus 3:4 suggests that there are some implications of the use of God's name. Den Hertog (2002:217) observes that the generic name God (אֱלֹהִים) is used to create the consequent need to maintain his distance since the personal name (יהוה), which is used in Exodus 3:14, reveals God's personal involvement in the event of the burning bush. Den Hertog means that God's official name אֱלֹהִים reflects the transcendent God while his personal name יהוה implies the immanent God. Den Hertog's suggestion can be supported by God's self designation (v 2) as "the angel of the LORD." This designation of God as an angel of the LORD shows that God's personal involvement with man is somewhat indirectly indicated, while it is a clear reference to God in many places in the Old Testament (Gn 16:7; Jdg 6:12; 13:3). In the biblical context "the angel of the LORD" is used interchangeably with "the LORD (יהוה)" as here. Cole (1973:64) calls this term a "reverential synonym for God's own presence." In the context of Moses, the term "the angel of the LORD" may be explained as an indication of his inability to recognize God. Therefore there are possibilities that Moses misunderstood God for the angel of the LORD, or the phrase is used as literary device for the immanence of the transcendent God.

It is notable that there are textual variances of the reference to God in Exodus 3:4. In the Samaritan Pentateuch, both "the LORD" (יהוה) and "God" (אֱלֹהִים) are written as "God" while the Greek translation (LXX) uses the word, "*kurius*" (κύριος), a translation of "יהוה" in *qere*. The Greek word κύριος is a translation of the word יהוה as אָדוֹן (lord, master). Aramaic Targumim translates in the same pattern as the LXX by using the word, יי (the Lord). The majority of English translation follows the practice of *qere*. In the Samaritan

Pentateuch, the reason for using the same word for either reference to God is not affirmatively known today. According to Den Hertog's argument on the use of the name, Samaritans may have understood the account of the burning bush as a more legalistic event where God's presence is shadowed by the usage of the legal name אֱלֹהִים. On the other hand, the elders of Israel who translated the LXX understood God in the burning bush account as a personal God of Moses and their ancestral God. Therefore the Greek and Targumim translations used יהוה (κύριος, יי) to indicate personal relationship in the account.

The Qur'anic text indicates that it was God who called Moses by using two different titles (Allah and Rabb). The Qur'an uses the two words interchangeably as in Surah 28:29, "O Moses! Verily I am Allah [*allah*] the Lord [*rabb*] of the Worlds..." and in Surah 20:12 says, "Verily I am thy Lord!" Unlike the Hebrew word "the LORD" which has a form of *qere* and *katib*, the two Arabic words for God appear in the absolute state. Originally the word *allah* is a composition of the article *al* and god *ilah*. However, as it appears 2,697 times in the Qur'an *allah* is treated as the "Proper name of the Almighty and Supreme Being" (Omar 2003:29). The name embraces all divine attributes mentioned in the Qur'an and thus functions as a collective proper noun, meaning as God of the Qur'an which should distinguished from personal gods of other religions (Omar 2004:28). In the same way, the word *rabb* is being treated as unique: "We must admit that all other languages lack an equivalent of the word [*rabb*]" (Omar 2004:198). However, in general, the word *rabb* conveys the basic meaning of a lord or master who has power that can be exercised over another. Thus, the word *rabb* does not indicate any ontological implication of the transcendence of God in reference to the use of God's name in the Qur'an.

Tuft (1983:20) presents the trend of the interpretation of the Qur'an thus: "From the time of Tabari to the present, the main objective of *tafsir* has been to provide a paraphrase translation of that context."⁶⁴ Accordingly, the majority of the scholars approach the incident of the burning bush as a stage in Moses' spiritual growth, which provides believers with a model of spiritual growth. For example, Khodr (1981:171) refers to this encounter with a burning bush as a presentation of a prototype of believers in spiritual growth. Moses, in his earnest quest, "has to leave his country and his family to walk by narrow paths in which divine Fire (the Burning Bush) burns all the impurities of passion in him and leaves him with one sole desire, that of seeing God face to face." Khodr (1981:173) further explains that Moses' progression in spiritual growth is completed with a mystical union with God as "The Burning Bush—at the same time created flame and uncreated Voice—becomes thus for al-Hallaj the symbol of a mystical union in which the human subject and the Divine subject discourse together, each witnessing to the Reality of the other." Even though Khodr provides a hint of an immanent God appearing in the episode as "...each witnessing to the Reality of the other," this aspect of the interpretation of the account is referred to as *tanzil* which reveals God's will to his prophet. Moses being God's prophet, the interpretation maintains the transcendence of God from Moses.

4.4.2.6 Conclusion

In summation, we can observe both the transcendence and the immanence of God in the biblical and Qur'anic accounts of the burning bush. One of the clear indications of the transcendence of God in the Qur'anic text is derived from the passive voice of the verb "He is

⁶⁴ The Arabic word *tafsir* means "Qur'anic exegesis."

called” which denied God’s presence in the story. This is supported by Moses’ understanding of the fire as an actual fire which the text did not reverse to God’s glory. The text simply uses the word that indicates firebrand in Arabic. The Qur’an does not provide any possible link to God’s immanent presence with Moses since the account diminished the immanence of God by using the passive voice. Furthermore, Moses’ understanding is shown as an incident where God called him as a prophet through inspiration.

On the other hand, the Exodus account reflects both a transcendent and an immanent God who appears before Moses. God called Moses from within the bush which shows that the commission took place in God’s spatial-immanent manifestation. This is further supported by the fact that the presence of God is manifested in the holy ground and the un-consuming fire, representative of the continuing presence of God in the Old Testament. As God appears before Moses, he maintains his distance from Moses through the implication of the unapproachable fire and the outer limitation of the holy ground. The Qur’an similarly implies the holy ground in its account. However, its presentation of the holy ground is in a wider spectrum and figuratively presented while the Bible directly hints that holy ground is locally limited and directly expressed as the place where God’s presence is presented. Furthermore this transcendence–immanence of God is seen in the use of God’s personal name (יהוה) which reflects his personal involvement with Moses while the legalistic name (אלהים) reflects his official transcendent state.

4.4.3 God and the pillar of cloud

The cloud motif, as representative of the presence of the Lord, is presented through the entire Bible (Wessner 2002:113). In the Old Testament, within the context of the Exodus of the

Israelites from Egypt, the unique phrase “pillar of cloud” is used twelve times (Ex 13:21, 22; 14:19, 24; 33:9, 10; Nm 12:5; 14:14; Dt 31:15; Neh 9:12, 19; Ps 99:7). In the New Testament a cloud is openly mentioned with regard to both the presence of God (cf. Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:34) and the coming of Christ or ascension of Christ to the heavens (cf. Mt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62; Lk 21:27; Ac 1:9; 1 Th 4:17; Rv 1:7). Wessner (2002:113) comments, “The pillar of cloud is reserved for God himself as he makes his presence known among his people, often as a means of divinely legitimizing the recipient, or ‘seer’ of the cloud. That is, one of the primary functions of the pillar of cloud is to portray the presence of the Lord visually.” Furthermore, in the biblical account of the Exodus, the pillars of cloud and fire were the Israelites’ guide in the desert and protection from Egyptian attack. In the later stage of Exodus, the pillar of cloud was God’s way of revealing himself to Israelites. The Qur’an refers to the biblical account of the cloud in two verses. The following are key verses of the account of the cloud in Exodus that appear in the Bible and the Qur’an.

Exodus 13:21-22 ²¹By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. ²²Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Exodus 14:24 ²⁴During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.

Numbers 12:5-6 ⁵Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When

both of them stepped forward, ⁶he said, “Listen to my words: ‘When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.

Surah 2:57 And We gave You the shade of clouds and sent down to you manna and quails saying: “Eat of the good things We have provided for you”; (but they rebelled); to Us they did no harm but they harmed their own souls.

Surah 2:210 Will they wait until Allah comes to them in canopies of clouds with angels (in His train) and the question is (thus) settled? But to Allah do all questions go back (for decision)

The biblical account illustrates the function of the cloud within the text. Numbers 12 indicates that God is standing before people speaking in a pillar of cloud. The cloud prevents the direct sight of God by the people. In a figurative use of cloud, Lamentations 3:44 indicates that God hides within the cloud as, “You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through.” In a similar way the cloud in the Exodus account is an expression of God’s method of his transcendence from the people. Furthermore, it seems that God dwells or abides (שָׁכַן as in Ex 40:35) in the cloud. He guides and protects Israelites from their exodus to their wandering into the desert as in Exodus 13:21 and 14:24. Sommer (2001:57) calls this is a divine immanence (associated with the root שָׁכַן) which was always subject to divine transcendence, and God’s permanent dwelling in heaven (associated with root יָשַׁב). God reveals himself as the immanent God with his temporal abode in the pillar of cloud and fire while maintaining his state as the transcendent God with his permanent dwelling place

in heaven. In 1 Kings 8 the filling of the cloud in the temple refers to the glory of the LORD (vv 10-11). Furthermore, it is Solomon's testimony that "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud" (1 Ki 8:12, cf. 2 Chr 5:13-14; 6:41). The earthly dwelling place of God (שֶׁכֶן) in the pillar of cloud later became the tabernacle and then the temple, where 2 Chronicles 6:41 indicates שֶׁכֶן is the resting place (לְנוֹחָיו) of God. The phrase "the resting place" is primarily a spatial reference which signifies not only absence of movement but being settled in a particular place with overtones of finality (Coppes 1980:562). This visible manifestation of God later became the *Shekinah* in the Targumim, which the Targumist used to signify God himself, for legal Judaism dislikes ascribing form or emotion to a deity (Stewart 1982:1101).

In brief, the pillar of cloud in the biblical account provides the following four functions: (1) external manifestation of the invisible God as discussed above; (2) protection of Israel from Egypt; (3) provision of direction in the wilderness and initiating departure of the camp; and (4) provision of shade in the wilderness. However, the Qur'an uses the word cloud (*ghamān*) in a lesser degree than does the Bible (S 2:57, 210; 7:160; 25:25). In the surrounding incident of the Exodus, the cloud only indicates a simple provision that covered the people from the heat. Surah 2:57 indicates that God sent a cloud along with manna and quails as an essential item for surviving in the desert. The phrase "the shade of clouds" refers to a shade made by a pillar of cloud that helped the people to stay cool under the sun when the Israelites travelled through the desert. The Qur'an has no indication of the cloud being God's abode as in the biblical cloud.

On the occasion of the word "cloud" used with reference to God's appearance in Surah 2:210, it seems as though the cloud corresponded to the biblical account of the pillar of

cloud. Surah 2:210 says, “Will they wait until Allah comes to them in canopies of clouds with angels (in His train) and the question is (thus) settled? But to Allah do all questions go back (for decision).” Shafi (2005a:516) interprets that such a coming of Allah will be fulfilled on Doomsday, and it pertains to the *Mutashābihāt*, statements of hidden meaning.⁶⁵ Therefore, the meaning of the “canopies of clouds” is not clear in the Qur’anic context, yet it seems to correlate with the biblical context of the second advent of Christ which accompanies the final judgment as described in Revelation 1:7 and Acts 1:11. Revelation 1:7 reads: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”

As both the Qur’an and the Bible mention the cloud in reference to the account of the Exodus, some issues of the pillar of the cloud must be dealt with. The cloud mentioned in the Qur’an and the Bible could have been the identical one. The cloud in the Qur’an reflects the ordinary understanding of the environment of the desert where the heat by day and the cold by night is apparent and fire is needed for heat. In this sense the Israelites could also have perceived the cloud for shade from the hot sun as well as God’s guidance and pillar of fire for keeping warm. Israelites, when they recall the incidents of the Exodus at their religious festivals,⁶⁶ recite Psalms 105:39: “He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night.” Furthermore, Isaiah 4:5-6 reflects on the cloud as being “a shelter and shade from

⁶⁵ *Mutashābihāt* means “Intricate sentence, or expressions, the meaning of which it is impossible for man to ascertain until the day of resurrection, but which was known to the Prophet” (Hughes [1885] 1998:519). It is one of the four categories of “Hidden sentences” used for the interpretation of the Qur’an.

⁶⁶ Psalms 78, 105, 106, Joshua 24:2-13 and Nehemiah 9:7-25 recall the Exodus for different purposes. These historical accounts reflect first hand understanding of surrounding incidents of the Exodus.

the heat of the day.” Therefore, the cloud of the Qur’an and the Bible can be treated as the identical cloud. However, the understanding of the presence of God in the cloud is important to the issue of the transcendence of God.

One of the most significant appearances of God in the Old Testament is the theophany of God in the pillars of cloud and fire. God goes ahead of the Israelites in a pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21). God defeats the Egyptian army from the pillar of cloud (Ex 14:24). He comes down in a pillar of cloud and stands at the tent of meeting (Nm 12:5-6; Dt 31:15-15) and speaks from the pillar (Ps 99:6-7). These accounts refer to the appearance of God as a cloud-fire theophany; he is immanent, because the people can see him, but he also is transcendent.

In the Qur’an on the other hand, the pillar of cloud is treated as a simple material cloud that provides shade to the people. The Qur’an treats clouds as a part of God’s provision for the people travelling in the desert. God says, “We gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you Manna and quails, saying: Eat of the good things we have provided for you:” (S 2:57 also see S 7:160). This account shows that the understanding of theophany in the biblical account was discarded in the Qur’an.

In conclusion, the cloud in the Exodus account of the Old Testament indicates the immediate presence of God that provided for the needs of the Israelites by providing God’s guidance and shade in the desert. The cloud was the external manifestation of the invisible God, thus protecting Israel from the Egyptian threat as well as the harm of natural danger. God was immanent with people through his active involvement while maintaining his transcendent state in the form of the pillar of cloud.

The application of the cloud in the Qur'an is identical to the Exodus account by way of a provision for shade. By meeting the physical need of the people, it can be said that the cloud in the Qur'an is the same as the cloud of Exodus. However, the issue of Yahweh's external manifestation is questionable in the Qur'an. The use of cloud in reference to God appears in Surah 2:210, where God's presence is indicated in the canopies of clouds with angels. However, the text indicates that the canopies of clouds appear in the context of the last day. Therefore, the canopies eliminate the presence of God. Conclusively, then, the pillar of cloud in the Bible is the expression of God's external manifestation while maintaining his transcendent state regarding the people. The same cloud in the Qur'an is a simple indication of God's provision for the people travelling in the desert. The account of the cloud in the Qur'an simply denies the immanence of God and thus maintains God's transcendence.

4.4.4 *Shekinah* and the Ark of the Covenant

“Structuralists have taught us that any sign has meaning only within a larger sign system” (Sommer 2001:41). In that sense, the *Shekinah* and the Ark of the Covenant may have undeniable connotations in the discussion of Moses and the transcendence of God in the Bible and the Qur'an. This, in the biblical account, is due to the Ark of the Covenant being the symbol of God's covenant; the *Shekinah* and the Ark of the Covenant portray God as permanently immanent with his people as a result of the covenant on the mountain.

The word *Shekinah* (שְׁכִינָה) is a Talmudic term meaning “presence of God” (Gesenius [1847] 1979:823), which is derived from *Piel* form of שָׁכַן (to dwell). Here the *Piel* indicates a causative rather than intensive nuance of the verb, as in Deuteronomy where God caused his

name to dwell (לְשֹׁכֵן שָׁמוֹ) (Dt 12:11; 14:23; 16:6, 11; 26:2). Similarly, Waltke and O'Connor (1990:400) argue that the *Piel* root of שָׁכַן indicates the state of God's dwelling rather than God's action. The word שְׁכִינָה which expresses God's immediate dwelling among the people first appears in Aramaic translations (Targums) of the Hebrew Bible. For example, God says according to Zechariah 2:10 (BHS): "וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם" (I will live among you). In Aramaic this verse is translated as: "וְאֲשֵׁרִי שְׁכִינְתִּי בְּגוּיְךָ" (I will cause my *Shekinah* to dwell among you). As the Targums are a written Chaldaic (Western Aramaic) translation and explanation of the Hebrew texts that have been passed down from postexilic Judaism (Würthwein 1995:79), *Shekinah* reflects the understanding of God's immanence with the intention of avoiding the "semblance of materialism" (Fausset 2003:3230). The Targums replace an indication of God in the first person (I will...) and his immanent appearance with *Shekinah*, and thus God's presence is referred to as third person (*Shekinah*) in which God's transcendence in his immanent state with the people is maintained.

Unlike the Bible, the word *Shekinah* actually appears in the Qur'an. Its basic meaning is "inner peace" or "security" which Allah bestows upon the people (S 2:248; 9:26, 40; 48:4, 18, 26). Ali (1989:102) comments on this word in reference to the biblical use as: "Later Jewish writings use the same word for a symbol of God's Glory in the Tabernacle or tent in which the ark was kept, or in the Temple when it was built by Solomon." Furthermore, Ali (1989:102) explains that the ark symbolised security and peace, which is carried by the cherubim on the lid. Ali's description fits the Mercy seat of God to which the biblical *Shekinah* refers. It is evident in Ali's understanding that the *Shekinah* of the Bible and the Qur'an are the same, but the usage reflects different meanings as we discuss below.

The Hebrew word for “ark” is אָרוֹן. This noun is used only in conjunction with the Ark of the Covenant except for the coffin of Joseph in Genesis 50:26.⁶⁷ Another Hebrew word for “ark” is תִּבְיָה, which is used twenty five times for the ark of Noah and twice for infant Moses’ basket which floated in the river. Unlike Hebrew which has clear distinguished usages for the word “ark,” Qur’anic Arabic somewhat interchangeably uses different words for the ark. First, the word *jara* and *safinah* only translate into “ship” in English. The word which is referring to Noah’s ark is *fulk*; it is used twenty-three times in the Qur’an. The Arabic word *tābūt*⁶⁸ is also used to indicate the Ark of the Covenant in Surah 2:248 and the only other use for the word *tābūt* appears in Surah 20:39 where it refers to Noah’s ark. The following verses reflect the major usages of the ark in both the Bible and the Qur’an.

Exodus 25:8-16 ⁸“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹Make this tabernacle... ¹⁰“Have them make a chest of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold moulding around it... ¹⁶Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.

⁶⁷ The word “ark” (אָרוֹן) is used 181 times in reference to the Ark of the Covenant, Ark of the Testimony, Ark of the LORD, and Ark of God (Kohlenberger III 1998:182). These four terms are referring to the same ark which contains the two tables of stone which constituted the “testimony” or evidence of God’s covenant with the people (Dt 31:26), the “pot of manna” (Ex 16:33), and “Aaron’s rod that budded” (Nm 17:10).

⁶⁸ The Qur’anic word *tābū* attributes its origin to Jewish Aramaic due to non-normative ending *-ūt* and is a cognate word to תִּבְיָה. The Bible use אָרוֹן for ark, but in post biblical Hebrew it is common to use תִּבְיָה for referring the ark. Therefore, it is suggested that in the redaction work of Mohammad he borrowed the word out of a rabbinic rather than biblical Hebrew literary context (Firestone 2003:10).

Surah 2:247-248 ²⁴⁷Their Prophet said to them: “Allah hath appointed Talut [Saul] as king over you.” They say: “How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority and he is not even gifted with wealth in abundance?” He said: “Allah hath chosen him above you and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess; Allah granteth His authority to whom He pleaseth. Allah careth for all and He knoweth all things.” ²⁴⁸And (further) their Prophet said to them: “A sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the Covenant with (an assurance) therein of security [*sakenah*] from your Lord and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron carried by angels. In this is a Symbol for you if ye indeed have faith.”

God commands Moses to make a sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ) in Exodus 25:8, so that he can dwell (שָׁכַן) among the people of Israel. The Hebrew word שָׁכַן reflects a permanent settlement of God’s presence among the people (Wilson 1996:109-111). The Ark of the Covenant is to be placed behind the curtains of the holy of holies (Ex 26:33) when the people have finished the construction of the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן). The word for sanctuary here is מִקְדָּשׁ, a general description of the tent which is “a holy place,” a place of God’s dwelling מִשְׁכָּן (tabernacle). The tabernacle is later replaced by the temple in Jerusalem. Additionally, this tabernacle is called the “tent of meeting” (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד) in Exodus 27:21 where Aaron and his son attended to the service of God. This tent or sanctuary is a different tent from the tent of Moses set up outside the camp in Exodus 33:7. Haran (1978:269) explains these two tents thus:

A fundamental distinction [between the P and E tents] is already evident in the very name of the two institutions: the word *miskan*, tabernacle, indicates

the place where God *soke*n, dwells, i.e., his abode; whereas *'ohel mo^eed* (the later noun being derived from the root *y^ed*) describes the place to which he comes at an appointed time, the tent to the entrance of which he descends in response to prophetic invocation, only to leave it when the communion with him is over.⁶⁹

According to Haran's explanation above, the tabernacle indicates a permanent presence of God while the tent of meeting implies a temporary presence of God as God left after finishing his communion with the people. God appears at appropriate occasions to reveal himself to Moses or other Israelites (Ex 33:9-11; Nm 11:16-17, 24-30; 12:5-10). In this tent, God initiates communication with the people (Wessner 2002:114). The tent outside the camp is called the Tent of Meeting which is not the official tent, the tabernacle.

Sommer (2001:45) brings a conclusive argument to the presence of God in the tabernacle: "Thus E does not portray God as permanently immanent; and even when the presence manifested itself, it did so outside the Israelite camp...E's tent contains no ark and no divine throne." From Sommer's assertion, it is understood that the tent which contains no ark implies the lack of God's presence. On the other hand, then, the tent which contains the ark represents the presence of God. In other words, the ark is an indication of the presence of God among the people.

In the Qur'an, Surah 2:247 unfolds the appointment of Saul (Talut) as king. The following verse explains that the authority of Saul is based upon the Ark of the Covenant, which brings

⁶⁹ In the documentary theory, P stands for the Priestly source while E stands for the Elohist source.

security from God (S 2:248). Ali translates the word for ark or chest (*taabot*) as “the Ark of the Covenant.” Other English translators indicate that *taabot* means “a heart” (Asad), “the chest” (Malik), and “the ark” (Pickthall). In the same way that the pillar of cloud is treated as a substantial object, the Ark of the Covenant in the Qur’an is treated as a tangible symbol of Saul’s faith before the people. The Qur’an says, “A sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the Covenant with (an assurance) therein of security from your Lord [*taabut fe –hi sakenah min rabb –kum...*]” (S 2:248). Here the word “security” is *sakenah* and “the ark” is *taabut*. The Qur’an uses the word for the ark (*taabut*) twice, here and in Surah 20:39. Surah 20:39 says concerning Moses, “Throw (the child) into the chest [*taabut*], and throw (the chest) into the river.” In both cases the ark is portrayed as an object used by man for man’s benefit.

Even though the Qur’an and the Bible refer to the Ark of the Covenant, the semantic implication is not same. In the Qur’an the ark is to bring security (*sakinah*) for Saul’s kingship. On the other hand, the Bible indicates that the ark is the dwelling place of God, as it is in the centre of the holy of holies where God says he will dwell (וְשָׁכַנְתִּי) among them (Ex 25:8; cf. 25:22). In contrast to the Qur’anic interpretation of *sakinah* as symbol of security, it represents God’s glory (*Shekinah*) dwelling among the people of Israel (Kaiser 1978:119). *Shekinah* in the Bible is derived from the verb “dwell” (*shakan*), as used in God’s command to “make a tabernacle that I might dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). Thus, *Shekinah* represents the immanence of the transcendent God among the people.

The Muslim use of the term (*sakina* [*sakenah*]) outside the Qur’an seems to explain a similar view point of God’s presence among the people. Khodr (1981:165) attests that in a state of

sakina, there are attending angels that represent God's presence. According to Ibn Kathir (1978:51) the presence of God is represented by angelic beings. This is seen in Surah 9:40:

If ye help not (your Leader) (it is no matter): for Allah did indeed help him:
when the unbelievers drove him out: he had no more than one companion:
they two were in the cave and he said to his companion "have no fear for
Allah is with us": then Allah sent down his peace [*sakenah*] upon him and
strengthened him with forces which ye saw not and humbled to the depths
the word of the unbelievers. But the word of Allah is exalted to the heights:
for Allah is Exalted in might Wise.

Surah 9:40 recounts the incident where Mohammad and Abu Bakr (the second of two) were hiding in a cave for three nights from the pursuit of Quraush. They were fleeing from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. Mohammad's expression of faith to his companion, Abu Bakr, was "have no fear for Allah is with us." His expression of faith was rewarded with God's peace (*sakenah*) which is the presence of angels who protected the two. Al Bukhari Hadith (5:430) confirms that the word *sakenah* is being used as help from God. It reads, "By Allah, without Allah we would not have been guided, neither would we have given in charity, nor would we have prayed. So (O Allah), please send Sakina (i.e. calmness) upon us, and make our feet firm if we meet the enemy as the enemy have rebelled against us, and if they intended affliction, (i.e. want to frighten us and fight against us then we would not)." *Sakenah* here is used as some kind of security or safety against hostility that comes from God.

Both the Qur'an and the Bible show the involvement of the angels in reference to the Ark of the Covenant. The Qur'an reports that the angels carry the ark (S 2:248). The Old Testament

indicates that Ark was covered by cherubim. These cherubim indicate the immanent presence of God in the Old Testament (Nm 7:89). Sommer (2001:49) further explains: “For example, the cherubim denote God’s physical presence throughout the Hebrew Bible. In the priestly tabernacle and in the Solomonic temple described in 1 Kings, the cherubim serve as a divine throne.” However, the Qur’an indirectly denies the presence of God by supplying the account that the ark was carried by the angel as, “...that chest will be carried by the angels” (Malik S 2:248), not the fact that angels provide a “divine throne.” The background for understanding this verse is probably 1 Samuel 5—10 where the ark was captured by Philistines and returned to Israel and Saul was made king of Israel. Usmani (2002a:140)⁷⁰ provides the Islamic account of the context where the angels carried the ark back to the house of Saul (Taloot). In the account the angels were a convoy for the ark, not the representation of God. The ark is indicated as a sign of the kingship of Saul as in Surah 2:248. Therefore, there is no indication of God’s presence in the Qur’anic account of the Ark of the Covenant.

In conclusion, the Ark of the Covenant in the Bible is the symbol of God’s presence among the people of Israel which is positively confirmed by the LXX translation as, “And thou shalt make me a sanctuary, and I will appear [ὁφθήσομαι] among you” (Ex 25:8). However, the Qur’an uses the ark as a credential for Saul’s kingship. The end of Surah 2:248 indicates that the ark is a symbol for the believers where they put their faith upon it. Surah 2:248 reads, “In

⁷⁰ “There was a box with the Bani Israeel [Israel] which they had possessed through posterities. This box contained some holy relics of Hazrat Moosa (عيسى) and other Prophets. The Bani Israeel put this box in the front line in times of war and God gave them victory by its auspices. When Jalot conquered them he also carried away that box. When God willed to bring it to the Bani Israeel He made it a cause of trouble and epidemic to the Unbelievers. Five cities of those Unbelievers were ruined and laid waste. At last they put that box on two bullocks and drove them away. The Angels drove those bullocks to the door of Taloot. When the Bani Israeel observed that sign they came to believe in his kingship.”

this is a Symbol for you if ye indeed have faith.” This verse might be another possible indication of human interpretation in the editorial work of the Qur’an. When the collection of the Qur’an took place, Muslims may have left out references to God’s dwelling among the people in the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the pillars of fire and cloud, in order to pursue their concept of the transcendence of God. The biblical account shows that God’s intention was his immanence among the people. The immanence of the transcendent God is shown through God’s choice of his dwelling place as the ark located in the Most Holy Place. The Qur’anic account simply eliminates any possible connection of God’s dwelling in the Ark of the Covenant and brings forth the purpose of the ark as a symbol of security and authority for Saul’s kingship.

4.4.5 Presence of God and Mount Sinai

4.4.5.1 Introduction

In the Bible and the Qur’an there are clear statements that people will not be able to see God. Exodus 33:20 presents a permanent prohibition that “you cannot [אֵל] see my [God] face, for no one may see me and live.” The Hebrew negation (אֵל) indicates permanent prohibition (or unconditional negation) compared to temporal negation (or conditional negation) לֹא. For example, the first of the ten commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3) uses אֵל to indicate a timeless command for the people of God. An example of the prohibition לֹא is seen in the context of Genesis 19:17. The command, “Don’t look [לֹא] back,” was given to Lot and his family at the time of their escape from Sodom. The negation (לֹא) is a conditional prohibition for a local situation of Lot. The command is not applied to a general or universal prohibition of looking back. Therefore, the negation (אֵל) in seeing God’s face is

a permanent prohibition in the Old Testament. The Qur'an readily agrees with the biblical prohibition against seeing God's face. Surah 7:143 rejects the request of seeing God as, "by no means canst thou see Me (direct)." Tuft (1983:18) argues that in the translation "you will never (*lan*) see Me," the Arabic negation *lan* represents a permanent and universal denial. Thus, Surah 7:143 seemingly denies any indication of God's possible immanence with his creation.

Despite the negative statements of seeing God according to both Scriptures, Moses and Aaron together with seventy elders of Israel and Nadab and Ahibu went up to the mountain and saw God (Ex 24:9-11; S 7:155). But they did not die as the result of seeing God. Exodus 24:11 says, "But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank." After seeing God on the mountain Moses requests to see God's glory (Ex 33). If Moses saw God with the elders of Israel before, what then was Moses actually asking of God? The Exodus account and the Qur'an indicate Moses' presence on the mountain as well as his request of seeing God's glory as following:

Exodus 33:16-23 ¹⁶How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" ¹⁷And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." ¹⁸Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot

see my face, for no one may see me and live.”²¹Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.²²When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.²³Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

Surah 7:142-143 ¹⁴²We appointed for Moses thirty nights and completed (the period) with ten (more): thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up): “Act for me amongst my people: do right and follow not the way of those who do mischief.”¹⁴³When Moses came to the place appointed by Us and his Lord addressed him He said: “O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me that I may look upon thee.” Allah said: “by no means canst thou see Me (direct); but look upon the mount; if it abide in its place then shalt thou see Me.” When his Lord manifested his glory on the mount He made it as dust and Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said: “Glory be to Thee! to thee I turn in repentance and I am the first to believe.” (Allah) said: “O Moses! I have chosen thee above (other) men by the mission I (have given thee) and the words I (have spoken to thee): take then the (revelation) which I give thee and be of those who give thanks.”

After the Exodus from Egypt the Israelites crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness (Ex 12). They made a journey into Sinai and established a covenant with God (Ex 19). The covenant was confirmed when Moses and Aaron and the elders of the people went up to the mountain (Ex 24). As Moses was with God to receive the Decalogue (Ex 24:12), the people worshipped

the golden calf. Moses' mediation prevented a total disaster upon the people (Ex 32). As a result of his mediation, God initiated the renewal of the covenant (Ex 34). Just before the renewal Moses confronts God with a request to see God's glory (Ex 33:12-23).

Moses initiated the conversation in reference to God's calling that he should lead the people out of Egypt (Ex 33:12). God confirmed the calling with an assurance: "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex 33:14). However, Moses asked God for more than a confirmation of God's will. He asked for a credential of his status as "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Ex 33:16). Here, Moses identified himself with the people who were distinguished from the rest of the people on earth. Then God offered Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (Ex 33:17). Moses did not hesitate to make his request; he wanted to see God's glory as he says: "Now show me your glory" (Ex 33:18).

The Qur'anic background to Moses on Mount Sinai is identical with that of the biblical account. Surah 7 alone provides a comprehensive story of the Exodus. The account began with Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh (S 7:104) followed by plagues upon the Egyptians (S7:132). After the Exodus (S 7:136, 138) Moses confronted God with a request of visible sight of God (S 7:143).

The first part of Surah 7:142 reads: "We appointed for Moses thirty nights and completed (the period) with ten (more): thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord forty nights." This verse indicates that Moses first spent forty days on the mountain, and afterward he instructed Aaron concerning the mischief of the people. Then Moses went to the

place where God appointed him. There Moses made his request to see the Lord. He says, “O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me that I may look upon thee” (S 7:143). Both the Qur’an and the Bible indicate that Moses requested an encounter with God. The interpretation of Moses’ request would yield an insight into Moses’ understanding God’s presence among the people, which will define the transcendence of God.

4.4.5.2 Moses’ request to see God

In both the biblical and the Qur’anic accounts Moses requested God to be able to see him on the Mount Sinai. The request of Moses (Ex 33:18) seems to refer to a visible manifestation of God’s glory as it reads, “Now show me your glory.” However, considering the fact that Moses and the elders of Israel have already seen God on the mountain as well as God’s reply in Exodus 33:20 where it says, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live,” the request appears to be a supplication for God’s visual appearance. In a similar context, the Qur’anic Moses also asked to see his Lord, which is answered with the impossibility of visual observation of God as “by no means canst thou see Me (direct)” (S 7:143).

In Exodus 24:11 the leaders of the Israelites saw God and they ate and drank. Booij (1984:8) presents two different views of the meal: the phrase “eating and drinking” refers to taking part in a sacrificial meal, or a simple expression for “to stay alive.” Then Booij concludes that both views have an element of truth. The text indicates the leaders of Israel had survived God’s wrath when they deserved to die because they had seen God. What they saw may not have been the direct visual appearance of God since the verse indicates, “...saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself” (Ex 24:10). The description indicates that the leaders saw a visual manifestation (of

God) as “pavement made of sapphire” not God himself. God’s statement (Ex 33:20) indicates that there is no exception--even to Moses--for someone to see God and live. In addition, God’s response to Moses reflects that the request is to see a visual manifestation of God. If Moses saw God with the elders, he would not ask again to see God. Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 4:15, “You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire.” This statement is evidence that the people did not observe the visual appearance of the Lord. The elders did not die because they did not see “God’s face,” but they saw a visual manifestation of the transcendent God, which the people comprehended as “seeing God.”

Due to God’s negative response to Moses’ request, “Now show me your glory” (Ex 33:18) in the Old Testament and “O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me that I may look upon thee” (S 7:143) in the Qur’an, it is evident that the request was to observe a visual appearance of God. Savran (2003:130) argues that Moses’ request to see God’s glory appeared to be a request for a visual revelation to which Yahweh is unwilling to agree. However, Savran explains that the revelation had two aspects: visual and verbal. The deeper revelation is primarily verbal communication which once the visual disclosure is established, then, one moves on to the significance of verbal communication. Therefore, Savran’s (2003:130) argument produces the nuance that Moses was not asking for a visual appearance of God, but a more intimate relationship than any other of the leaders of the Israelites who saw God before. This led to one possible view that Moses was petitioning about God’s true self. Furthermore, the question is answered by God’s own statement of himself (Ex 34:6-7): “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the

children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” This is God’s self revelation that provides Moses with the true nature of Yahweh.

The Qur’anic Moses’ request can be similarly interpreted as in the biblical context. Concerning Moses’ request to see God in Surah 7:143, Khodr (1981:167) presents two types of knowledge involved in the visions of God (*Ru’yaa*). These are inward and outward knowledge. Inward knowledge means the inward eye that sees the vision of God in the heart which God grants people in his mercy. Outward knowledge refers to the outward eye which sees physical things. This definition of *Ru’yaa* implies that God’s answer to Moses, through the earthquake manifestation of God’s appearance in Surah 7:143, is visible with the physical or outward eye which sees a natural phenomenon. On the other hand, there is no indication of Moses who experienced God’s presence with an inward eye since the text eliminates any sort of appearance by God before him. Thus, the account reflects the transcendence of God. This would contradict biblical accounts of God’s visual appearance before Moses, which indicates ontological immanence of the transcendent God.

4.4.5.3 God’s response to Moses’ request

In the Old Testament, God gave Moses a positive answer to his request, not necessarily to show himself with direct physical manifestation but with a more intimate vision of God. Britt (2002:58) brought the term “Revelation entails concealments” in his discussion of a scene of a type of theophany. In applying the term (“Revelation entails concealments”) to the case of Moses on the mountain, he reckons, the immanence of God (revelation) must be accompanied by the transcendence of God (concealments). God, in this context, wants to answer the request of Moses, which he presumably understood as the spatial immanent

presence of God (Ex 33:20).⁷¹ In order to grant Moses' wish, God must present himself ontologically before Moses, yet the direct revelation of God is impossible, since God declares that no one can see his face (Ex 33:20). This problem is solved by his transcendent withdrawal from Moses' direct sighting, as God grants, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you...you will see my back" (Ex 33:19). The phrase "all my goodness" hints that the physical observation is blocked for Moses, while God's back indicates a direct ontological manifestation of God.

God prohibits Moses from seeing him directly (Ex 33:20), but he allows Moses to see his back as he passes in front of Moses (Ex 33:21; 34:5-7; cf. Gn 16:13 where Hagar saw the back of God). Jacob (1992:975) asserts that seeing God's face refers to an inner experience that enables one to see the reflected splendour of God. Thus, he interprets seeing God as seeing God's glory. Durham (1987:452) says, "The human family cannot look upon Yahweh and survive: the gap between the finite and the infinite is too great; it is an experience of which man is incapable. Yahweh thus makes provision for the experience Moses is to have by designating a place on Sinai in the fissure of a rocky cliff. There Moses can stand as Yahweh's glory (= Presence) comes near and passes by." These interpretations indicate that the incident is a convincing example of the transcendence of God accompanying the immanence of God. Moses cannot see the face of God, yet he definitely experiences the presence of God. This implies, at least to Moses, that while people truly can know God by

⁷¹ However, Durham (1987:452) presents opposite view of the Moses' request as, "כבוד" 'glory' in this context is very close to a synonym for פנים 'face, presence,' as the ensuing narrative shows. Neither term is intended to suggest 'human features.'" It is clear from the response of God that Moses actually requested to see God's physical face which God answered negatively.

experiencing his presence, they can never know him exhaustively because of his transcendent state.

Wessner (2002:114) approaches God's response with Waltke's linguistic lens. He observes the verbs involved in the passage: "You are not able to see (Qal) my face...you will see (Qal) my back, but my face will not be seen by you (Niphal)." Here, Moses is clearly viewed as passive (*niphal*) in receiving God's revelation. Moses wants to be an active agent (*qal*) in seeing the God's *face*, but he could only be the active agent (*qal*) in seeing the God's *back*. Yahweh would not let his face be seen passively, but he actively reveals himself. Both verbally and physically God initiates the revelation experience. As in the other Old Testament uses of פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים (Gn 32:30; Ex 33:11; Nm 12:8; 14:14; Dt 34:10; Jdg 6:22), man can not *actively* initiate face-to-face interaction with Yahweh. Instead, Yahweh is the active initiator, and people are the passive receptors of the intimate presentation of him.

Contrary to the limited experience of the immanence of God in the biblical context, the Qur'an indicates total transcendence in Moses' request to see God. Moses says, "O my Lord! Show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon Thee" (S 7:143). God answered Moses through an angel that, if the mountain stands when he manifests his glory, then Moses will be able to see him. The mountain becomes like dust on the ground (S 7:143) and therefore God's answer is that Moses is not able to see him. The negative answer of God denies the presence of God in the context as well as any possibility of his immanent presence in the events on Mount Sinai.

However, in the Qur'anic response of God, one can perceive both a feasible and infeasible possibility of seeing God. Initially, there is a strong denial of the vision of God. Tuft

(1983:18) says, “The emphatic reply ‘you will never see Me,’ which the Qāḍī interprets as a permanent and categorical denial of *ru’yā*, the terrifying destruction of the mountain and the frightened repentance of Moses all fall into narrative place as a dramatic rebuke to a sceptical people who have pushed their prophet into a terrible ordeal.” He further adds that “the negative force of the *lan* particle in God’s refusal is restricted to Moses and that the refusal is not categorical, since God says ‘You will not see Me’, not ‘I am not seen’” (Tuft 1983:19). God’s emphatic rejection to Moses’ request denied Moses being an active agent of seeing God, yet opens up the possibility of God being an active agent of a revelation. The possibility of seeing God is confirmed in Surah 7:143 where it provides the conditional aspect of seeing God: “if it abides in its place then shalt thou see Me.”

Another difficulty is the interpretation of Moses’ request based on Surah 42:51 which states the fact that God speaks to man only indirectly. However, in the dialogue recorded in Surah 7:143 it is possible that the verse indicates an exception to the general rule. The verse rejects a direct confrontation between Moses and God. For that reason, “...while the nature of divine speech was a controversial problem of early Islamic theology, little or no reference to verse VII:143 was made in the discussions of the problem” (Tuft 1983:3). Tuft continually presents the interpretation of *Ru’yaa* (the vision of God).

From the earliest days of Islam *Ru’yaa* is impossible in the present. However Tuft (1983:4) argues the presumable way of *Ru’yaa* is: “The widespread belief that God would be visible in the next life, whether presiding over the Last Judgment or as the ultimate reward of paradise.” The teaching of *hadith* found, with slight variations in wording in various collections, that the concept of *ru’yaa* is an ultimate reward in paradise. For example: “He raises the people of the chambers to their chambers. These are whitened with pearls, verdant

with emeralds, ruddy with rubies on their doors and within. It is everlasting morning inside; there are wives, slaves and pendant fruit. Yet of all these things none did they need more, none was greater joy to them than the sight of their Lord” (Tuft 1983:5). Sahih Al-Bukhar Hadith (1:529, 547, 770; 6:374; 9:529-536) has an extensive word of promising “You will see your Lord as clearly as the full moon” which is confirmed in the Qur’an 75:22-23: “Some faces that Day will beam (in brightness and beauty) Looking towards their Lord.” Furthermore, Sahih Muslim Hadith (1:77) reads:

The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said: When those deserving of Paradise would enter Paradise, the Blessed and the Exalted would ask: Do you wish Me to give you anything more? They would say: Hast Thou not brightened our faces? Hast Thou not made us enter Paradise and saved us from Fire? He (the narrator) said: He (God) would lift the veil, and of things given to them nothing would be dearer to them than the sight of their Lord, the Mighty and the Glorious.

Again, the difficulty of interpreting Moses’ request of “seeing God” may be interpreted in the non-literal sense. The non-literal interpretation is based on the Islamic belief that “the mantle of prophethood guaranteed him a certain doctrinal impeccability (*isma*)” that Moses is assumed to enjoy a full, accurate and complete knowledge of God and His attributes, “for if Moses was pleading for optical sight of God in verse VII:143, he was ignorant of God’s attributes; if he was seeking immediate knowledge of God, Moses was ignorant of epistemology as outlined by ‘Abd al-Jabbar. In either case, the request threatens Moses’ reliability as prophet, at least from a Mu’tazilite point of view” (Tuft 1983:13, 17). Therefore, the request of Moses must be interpreted in a non-literal sense in Islam.

God transcended all descriptions, in conclusion, that might impute corporeality to him. Incorporeally, God cannot be said to have colour, spatial location, or any other bodily qualities. On the other hand, humankind perceives corporeal qualities or bodies in a particular spatial position with respect to itself. Humankind cannot perceive the incorporeal. Direct vision of God is therefore impossible.

4.4.5.4 Spatial revelation of God

In reference to the divine-human relationship, the spatial distance between God and his people is observed on Mount Sinai. Before God revealed himself, he set the boundary around the mountain to set it apart as a holy place (Ex 19:12, 23). Then the people themselves made a distance from the presence of God as they feared the Lord's manifestation (Ex 20:18-21). Jeremiah 23:23-24 also describes Yahweh as a God of distance and nearness: "Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD." Lemke (1981:547-551), in his discussion of Jeremiah 23:23-24 made observations on how the distance is developed. He presents a consequence of sin as one of the significant reasons for the distance of God: "Most commonly the distance of God was something which was experienced in the life of an individual or a group of people when the relationship with God was broken because of sin" (Lemke 1981:547-548). The distance here acts as a safeguard against the undesirable experience of the holy God (Lemke 1981:547). This explains the spatial distance at the mountain as God reveals himself before Israel. When God sets a boundary to make spatial distance, he provides the reason for the consecration of the people before they cross over the boundary. Exodus 19:21-22 shows that the people must be holy before they face God's presence as it is written, "and the LORD said to him, 'Go down

and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.”

In spite of maintaining his transcendence, on the contrary, God removed the spatial distance by permitting Moses to stand at his appointed place. God said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock” (Ex 33:21). The phrase “a place near me” (מִקְוֹם אִתִּי) literally means “a place with me.” The Hebrew phrase reflects a definite spatial nearness to God as it can not apply to temporal nearness when referring to Moses’ physical standing. Durham (1987:452) confirms that God’s presence came near Moses in spatial terms, and hints that God provided protection over Moses for the purpose of preventing the accidental sight of God. God’s provision of covering Moses in order to provide safety from seeing God directly is an indication of God’s spatial revelation on the mountain. If there is no immediate spatial revelation of God on the mountain, it is not necessary for God to provide protection for Moses.

Contrary to the biblical account of God’s declaration and his self-revelation, the Qur’anic account demonstrates the general manifestation of God in the form of an earthquake. Surah 7:143 pictures the earthquake phenomenon, “When his Lord manifested his glory on the mount He made it as dust and Moses fell down in a swoon” (S 7:143). Moses went up to Mount Sinai seeking a direct vision (*nazar*) of God. But God gives him the sign of the crashing mountain, thus clearly indicating the impossibility of such a vision (Khodr 1981:174).

When God answered Moses' request, Moses first saw the fearful earthquake phenomenon and he fell down in a "swoon." Concerning the state of Moses, Tuft (1983:16) concludes that the proper reading for the sentence *wa-kharra Musa sa'iqan* is that Moses fell unconscious. Accordingly, Moses experienced the presence of God (*Ru'ya*) while he was in a state of unconsciousness. Thus, God maintains his transcendence by avoiding direct revelation (*Nazar*) of his manifestation before Moses.

Khodr (1981:166) explains the difficulty of the exposition of Moses' request to see God as "There is a sense then, both in the Christian and Muslim tradition, in which we can 'see' or witness God's presence. But that which we are granted to see are God's manifestations, not His Nature." His statement, in conclusion to the context of Moses, may apply to the Qur'anic account, while in the biblical account, it brings a need for further definition of God's nature since biblical Moses experienced the presence of God in a state of spatial revelation and in his consciousness.

After witnessing the glory of God passing before him and sighting the back of God, "Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped" (Ex 34:8). The phrase "at once" (וַיִּמְהַר) carries the intensive verb (*piel*) meaning of "quickly" to indicate Moses' recognition of God's self-revelation in the biblical account. After seeing and hearing God's self declaration (Ex 34:6-7), Moses fell to the ground to worship God without hesitation. God, in response, made a covenant with him and gave further instruction to the people of Israel.

In the same way as the biblical account the Qur'anic Moses responded with worship. He also confesses his lack of faith: "Glory be to Thee! to thee I turn in repentance and I am the first to believe" (S 7:143). Then, as in the Bible, God confirmed his relationship with Moses and

gave him the revelation which is said to be the Ten Commandments (S 7:144-145). Receiving the Ten Commandments indicates that Moses, whether he saw God or not, recognised God's presence on the mountain as reflected in his worshipping of God. The biblical account convincingly indicates that the visual manifestation God was observed by Moses, while the Qur'anic account indicates that the manifestation of God is revealed as a natural phenomenon of an earthquake. The Qur'anic revelation can be said to be transcendent revelation while the biblical revelation is immanent revelation.

4.4.5.5 Leadership credibility

In the discussion of Moses' encounter with God on the mountain, the issue of the credibility of a leader in the Qur'anic text seems to play a major role in understanding the theophany on Mount Sinai. The Qur'an indicates that Moses' encounter with God on the mountain was a test of Moses (S 7:155). Furthermore, it seems that the appearance of God's glory on the mountain is interpreted in the literal sense, with physical thunder and lightning. Surah 3:183 says, "Allah took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless he showed us a sacrifice consumed by fire (from heaven)." This test of a prophet (Moses) is further elaborated on when the people "asked Moses for an even greater (Miracle), for they said: 'Show us Allah in public.'" Moreover, the people say to Moses, "We shall never believe in thee until we see Allah manifestly" (S 2:55). In addition to the people's request for leadership credentials, Husain (1959:37) sees the miracles performed by Moses in Egypt as credentials of leadership. He says:

It may well be that the miracles of Moses were not for the purpose of convincing Pharaoh of his being a prophet and of the majesty of his God.

Rather they were to assure the Jews themselves that Moses had behind him a power greater than that of the Egyptians. Miracles frighten tyrants and strengthen the victims of oppression to hold on. The Jews were in need of many miracles before any of them were fully persuaded.

The leadership issue is further seen in Joshua 4:14 where the Lord honoured Joshua: “That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.” The leadership choice of Joshua shows that God elected a leader with an established leadership status over the people. Therefore, in the case of Moses, the self-revelation and his request for a direct vision of God can be interpreted as improving his leadership status.

The leadership issue can be seen through several categories of God’s self-revelation. First, there is a universal or general revelation of God, which can be defined thus: “General revelation, which is preliminary to salvation, reveals aspects about God and His nature to all mankind so that all humanity has an awareness of God’s existence” (Enns 1997:186). In the Exodus account of Mount Sinai the people of Israel saw the thunder and lightning with a thick cloud and heard a very loud trumpet (Ex 19:16). Everyone who observed the revelation could perceive God’s presence. The understanding of God’s appearance on the mountain by the people is well described in Deuteronomy 18:16: “For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’” Whether the people understood God’s appearance as a direct visual manifestation or not, the people acknowledged their hearing of God’s voice and perceived God’s manifestation in fire.

After God's general revelation before the general population of Israel, God reveals himself before Moses, Aaron, and seventy two leaders of Israel. Here, they saw God (Ex 24:10). In the case of Moses on the mountain (Ex 33), God reveals himself on a personal and intimate level. These two incidents can be described as special revelation which can be defined as follows: "Special revelation is narrower than general revelation. While all mankind is the recipient of general revelation, not all are the recipients of special revelation" (Enns 1989:187). It can be said that the self-revelation of God is a special revelation that indicates the immanent state of God (as in the biblical account of Moses) during the creation while general revelation tends to reflect the transcendent state of God (as in the Qur'anic account of Moses) by displaying the power of God over the creation.

"Seeing God" is Moses' request which should have enabled him to be distinguished from the other leaders and the people as a chosen leader of God. Moses may have felt this was needed since the people of Israel continuously rebelled against him. When Moses asked for God's name to be told to the elders of Israel in Egypt, he was looking for an indication of his distinguished status over them. Furthermore, the way Moses commanded Aaron to perform wondrous signs before Pharaoh and overcome the sorcerers of Egypt had established his leadership over Aaron and the Egyptians. Aaron and Miriam as well as the 250 leaders with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram challenged Moses' leadership. This challenge was an indication of unstable leadership (Nm 12:2; 16:2). Therefore, having seen God with other leaders (Ex 24:10), Moses is asking for something more than the people and the leaders saw. He wants to see a direct visual manifestation of God. For Moses, exposing himself before the visual manifestation of God will confirm and establish his strong leadership status over the people of Israel.

4.4.5.6 Synthesis

We find a scene with the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai and a visual appearance of God in the biblical account. On the contrary, there is a non-visual manifestation of God in the Qur’anic account. As Tuft (1983:40) defines “that visual objects require a spatial location with respect to the eye,” Moses requests a visual recognition of God which was positively answered by God. On the other hand, the Qur’anic Moses’ request should be understood as *Ru’yaa* (vision of God). The request was answered with a natural earthquake manifestation of God. It is a central fact in Islam that God revealed himself to man in language intelligible to both (Tuft 1983:10-11), but it is not in the same manner of a visual revelation because the God of Islam is a transcendent God.

4.4.6 Conclusion

The biblical account of Moses shows the continuation of God’s immanent-transcendent presence with the people. God’s continued presence is first indicated from his announcement from the burning bush. Both the fire and the voice indicate the spatial presence of God with Moses. This presence of God is confirmed through his appearance in the pillar of cloud and fire. Furthermore, the Ark of the Covenant made it possible for God’s presence to continue among the people. The apex of God’s immanent-transcendent presence comes from the revelation God on Mount Sinai. Moses was asking for God’s spatial-ontological presence. God denied the physical, which can be called ontologically immanent revelation to Moses. However, God allows Moses to see his “back” (the immanence of transcendent revelation).

Then, God, in the account of the biblical Moses appeared before him and the people as the transcendent-immanent God.

On the other hand, in the Qur'anic accounts Moses confirms the absolute transcendence of God. Ironically, the confirmations of the absolute transcendence of God come from the same accounts that proved the immanence of God in the Bible. The mystic fire was treated as physical fire which gave light and heat instead of the continued presence of God, as in the Bible. Both the pillar of cloud and fire were used as provisions for those travelling in the desert. Furthermore, the Ark of the Covenant was used as the symbol of Saul's kingship. Finally, the manifestation of God on Mount Sinai was treated as a natural phenomenon which answered Moses' request of a vision of God (*ru'yaa*). God, in the Qur'anic account of Moses, denied his presence with the people and maintained an absolute transcendent status before man.

4.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.5.1 Introduction

Under the three major headings, "Transcendent God and Adam," "Transcendent God and Abraham," and "Transcendent God and Moses," we have looked into the transcendence and immanence of God in the Qur'an and the Bible. The passages examined were limited to the Old Testament and the Qur'an portions which are parallel to each other concerning the relationship of God with Adam, Abraham, and Moses. The three figures of the Bible and the Qur'an were chosen for the discussion of comparative understanding of the transcendence of

God, for they are foundational figures of both faiths. Additionally, the textual similarities are more comparable than with any other prophets that appear in the Scriptures.

4.5.2 Transcendent God and Adam

Three major discussions were presented under the heading of “Transcendent God and Adam.” Concerning Adam’s role in the creation, the biblical Adam shows a very close relationship with God, to the degree of being God’s co-worker in the creation process by giving names to every animal and bird. The naming of the animals reflects Adam’s rightful place as owner and ruler of those he named. However, the Qur’anic Adam clearly reflects God’s purpose of man’s creation as *khalefah*, who is the rightful ruler of the earth on behalf of his master, Allah. This self-domination within the limits of God’s approval is identical with the biblical account. On the other hand, the Qur’anic Adam did not participate in the creation process. He was given the names of all things and simply recited them before the angels to prove man’s superiority over the creation, including angels. Thus, as the creation took place solemnly upon God’s will, the biblical Adam’s ability to participate in the creation process indicates that there is less of a transcendental gap between man and God. In the Qur’anic account, God maintains his absolute transcendent state in the creation process as well as afterwards, when Adam is a *khalefah* (caliph) under God’s pre-approved plan.

The location of the Garden and its purpose also reflects God’s transcendent relationship with his creation. In Islam, the Garden of Eden and Heaven seem to be identical, as shown in its usage in the Qur’an. The purpose of the Garden was to test Adam and Eve’s obedience before Allah sent them to earth as *khalefah*. The sending may reflect a punishment for their

disobedience. Afterward, heaven, which is identical to the Garden of Eden, became a place of reward for faithful believers of Islam. As a reward, heaven became an extension of earthly life without hardship or evil but with only joyous activities. On the other hand, God created the biblical garden on earth at the end of the creation as a place of rest and worship and fellowship with man. Heaven is another place of rest, worship, and fellowship with God after life on earth. In a sense, heaven is a second Garden of Eden after the first Garden became inaccessible because of man's sin. As a place of fellowship and worshipping God, there is no spatial transcendence between God and man in the Garden as Genesis 2:15 and 3:8 reflects. On the other hand, the Qur'anic garden shows the absolute transcendence of God. Since the Garden is located in heaven, the presence of God with man is observed in the heaven before the Fall only. There is no spatial immanence of God in the Qur'anic garden.

The Qur'anic and biblical accounts of the Fall of man are essentially identical. However, the result produces somewhat different implications. The creational and spatial immanence of God reflected in the biblical garden is removed by the Fall of man. And for the penalty of sin, man was to bear the curse of God as shown in Genesis 3. Being unholy with the mantle of sin, man is to be separated from the holy God, ceasing close fellowship with God in the Garden. On the other hand, in the Qur'an, man's sin was forgiven and he was sent to earth as *khalifah* to fulfil the purpose of his creation. While the Old Testament maintains the original sin because the man did not ask for forgiveness nor did God forgive them, the Qur'anic man does not carry original sin because of their repentance and forgiveness given by God. This implies that the account of the Fall does not change the status of God's transcendence in the Qur'an. On the other hand, the Old Testament indicates that the immanence of God is

diminished because of man's unrepentance and expelling from the Garden, while the transcendence of God is further imposed upon man.

4.5.3 Transcendent God and Abraham

In the discussion of the transcendent God and Abraham, both the Qur'an and the Bible talk about Abraham being the "friend of God." The Qur'an uses the word friend (*khalil*) to refer to Abraham. The Arabic word *khalil* basically indicates a friendship in reference against enmity between man and man. However, the Bible uses a more intimate word for friend, אָהֵב. This Hebrew word is used by God to refer to Abraham as his friend, which indicates God's love towards Abraham. However, when man uses a word for friend (for God or his neighbour) the word רֵעַ is used. It refers to human relationships compared to אָהֵב, which indicates an intimate relationship between God and man. The friendship recounted in the Qur'an implies a legalistic relationship where there is no enmity between God and Abraham, while the biblical Abraham was corroborated by God as being in an intimate unconditional loving relationship. Furthermore, God initiated the friendship in the biblical account, thus bringing the possibility of an immanent God. The Qur'an maintains the transcendence of God through citing the submission of Abraham that qualifies Abraham to be called "friend of God."

God's intimate friendship with Abraham in the biblical account is well reflected in "God at the entrance of the tent," with the physical manifestation of God before Abraham. However, the Qur'an maintains absolute transcendence of God for there is no account of God's appearance before Abraham. In the biblical account, close friendship is reflected through Abraham's hosting of the guests, including God, with a fellowship meal. This is followed by

God's recognition of Abraham's ascendancy over Sodom and Abraham's petition for deliverance of Sodom and its inhabitants. God's willingness to grant Abraham's request is another indication of God's close relationship with Abraham. On the other hand, the Qur'anic account further maintains God's absolute transcendence by removing the account of the third guest, who is identified as God in the Bible. There is no possibility of God's immanence in the Qur'anic account of God at the entrance of Abraham's tent.

The intimate biblical friendship of Abraham is confirmed when God tests him with the command to offer his son as a sacrifice. God tested man to know what is in his heart. Abraham passed the test with credit as a righteous man. Furthermore, he was able to perceive the presence of God as well as to receive God's provision for the offering. Similarly, the Qur'anic account of the test of offering involves Abraham's unidentified son. However, there is no account of God's appearance but only an account of rewarding Isaac as one of the Righteous. If the rewarding of Isaac confirms what he has done in obedience to God and his father, the unidentified son could relate to Isaac, as Abraham requested a righteous (son) in Surah 37:100. However, it is normal to interpret the unidentified son as Ishmael in the circle of Qur'anic scholars. In the Qur'anic account, the transcendence of God is continuously maintained without a hint of God's immanence in the scene. Yet the biblical account shows both the transcendence and immanence of God. God maintains his transcendent state by identifying himself as the angel of God and speaking from the unreachable dwelling place of God, heaven. However, Abraham perceives and sees God, therefore naming the place as, "Jehovah Jireh," which means either "The Lord will see" or "The Lord will provide." This is the understanding of Abraham concerning God's appearance on the mountain, which seems to be the prefigurative model of God's appearance before Moses.

4.5.4 Transcendent God and Moses

The major issue of God's presence in the burning bush has been the origin of the voice. In the Genesis account, God actively speaks from within the burning bush. Moses hears God's voice and reacts with proper reverence before God. However, the Qur'anic account uses a passive verb that translates as "He is called." Together with Moses' understanding of the fire as actual fire, the account of the origin of the voice indicates there is no presence of God in the burning bush narrative. However, the biblical Moses understood the fire as a fiery manifestation of God. With God's voice coming from within the bush, the biblical account shows the spatial immanence of God. However, God maintains his transcendent state from Moses by the unapproachable fire as well as by limiting Moses' advance within the boundary of holy ground.

Both the Qur'an and the Bible use the cloud to provide shade and rain. It is God's provision to his people in the desert providing comfort and blessing. However, the Exodus account in the Old Testament indicates something more than a simple natural cloud for the people; there is God's presence within the pillar of cloud. The presence of God in the pillar of cloud guides the people throughout the wilderness and protects them as well from the hands of the Egyptian army. Within the camp of Israel, the presence of God is manifested in the pillar of cloud during his discourse with the people. If the burning bush is God's manifestation to Moses on a personal level, this is a general manifestation of God before the people of Israel. Hereby they perceive God's presence by seeing and hearing the voice of God. Yet, the Qur'an does not account for God's presence in the cloud within the account of the wilderness.

Concerning the Ark of the Covenant, Exodus 25:8 reads, “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.” The sanctuary (sacred place) is later identified as the Ark of the Covenant, the place of God’s dwelling [*shakinah*] and manifestation as LXX translates, “I will appear among you.” However, the Ark of the Covenant is somehow unapproachable and untouchable by the people. It reflects the spatial transcendence of God while at the same time reflecting his spatial immanence among the people. In the Qur’anic account, once again, the account of God’s immanence is omitted but the ark is used as the tangible sign of the authority [*shakinah*] of Saul.

The focal argument of the transcendence of God on the mountain has been the biblical Moses’ request to see God’s glory and the interpretation of the vision of God (*ru’yaa*) in the Qur’an. The Qur’anic Moses’ request of *ru’yaa* was answered with the natural or general manifestation of God in the form of the earthquake phenomenon, which results in Islam’s ontological understanding of the absolute transcendent God. On the other hand, the biblical Moses experiences the intimate outward appearance of God with the limitation of not being able to see God directly. God himself agreed to appear before Moses and showed himself as much he can allow showing himself without violating his transcendent state from man. It was God’s personal self-manifestation before Moses in granting his request. While maintaining his transcendence from Moses, God appeared before Moses in order set him apart as a leader of the people to be able to guide them on behalf of God.

4.5.5 Conclusion

So far we have noted that there are minor textual differences between the Qur’anic and biblical accounts of God’s relationships with Adam, Abraham, and Moses, with major

differences in understanding God's relationship with man. This is seen through exegesis of the texts, which produces both similarities and complete differences in the understanding of God's relations. Without deciding the redactor's role concerning an absence of the biblical account in the Qur'an, it is sufficient to say that on several points between the two Scriptures, they are distinctively different in expression of God's relationship with his creation.

In the Qur'an, the relationship of the examined texts is revealed as absolute transcendence of God from man. There is no indication of the possibility of God's ontological immanence with man, as those accounts are simply absent from the narratives. Conversely, the biblical accounts constantly show the immanence of God while God maintains his transcendent state from man in the form of theophany.

In the Qur'an the transcendence of God is expressed as a total spatial separation from humans and nature, so that there is no way for man to know or experience him. Furthermore, the Qur'an appears to be written to make polemic arguments against the polytheism which was common among Arabs at that time, and against the Christian concept of the Trinity. The Qur'an argues against any spatial association of humans and nature with God. This, in turn, influences its overall message about the absolute transcendence of God.

Furthermore, unlike the people of Israel who experienced both the transcendence and immanence of God, Muslim believers' lack of experience of God in their lives may also contribute to the concept of the absolute transcendence of God. This is evident because when the Qur'an retells the biblical stories of the transcendence and immanence of God, it eliminates the presence of God within the stories: for example removing the third visitor from the story of the three men who visit Abraham on the way to Sodom.

Due to these aspects of the polemic arguments and the lack of experience of God among Muslims, for “knowledge depends upon the known” (Özcan 1997:63), the message of the Qur’an may reflect that God is totally separated from his creation. On the other hand, in light of the Islamic view of transcendence, Muslims may argue that there is no transcendence of God in the Bible, since God voluntarily dwelt among the people. However, the transcendence of God does exist in the Old Testament in the way the Qur’an expresses it. Yet, the transcendence of God in the Old Testament co-exists with the immanence of God.

It seems that transcendence of God, which accompanies his immanence in the Old Testament, is due to the unholy nature of man which prevents man from coming fully into the presence of the Holy God, as is evident in the response of Isaiah before the Holy God (Is 6:5) and in the theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19). Furthermore, God constantly commands Israel to be holy in order for God to dwell among them (Lv 11:44-45; 15:31; 19:2; Dt 23:14). Thus, it may be concluded that the Qur’an expresses an absolute transcendence of God which denies the knowledge of God while the Old Testament paradoxically presents the transcendent-immanent God, affirming the knowledge of God but in a limited scope due to man’s unholy nature.

Werner Lemke (1981:547-551) confirms that God maintains a distance from humans. He says the distance between God and man is created as a consequence of sin, resulting in the broken relationship.⁷² Lemke sees a distance from the sapiential nature of God that God is all knowing and all-powerful. He calls this divine transcendence. Lemke’s argument of the distance of God can be categorised into two perspectives: negative and positive. Negatively, a

⁷² Samuel Balentine (1999:20) supports that God’s absence or God’s withdrawals from the world is due to human transgression.

distance between God and man is created due to a break in the divine-human relationship brought about either by human sin, or through the apparent triumph of evil. Positively, a distance between God and man is created in the connotatively divine power, wisdom, providential foreknowledge, and inscrutability (Lemke 1981:551). In the sense of Lemke's argument, the Qur'anic transcendence of God is due to the divine power of God that transcends men's power, wisdom, and knowledge as seen in the argument of the transcendent God with Adam, Abraham, and Moses. On the one hand, the biblical God made his transcendent state due to the sin of man. However God wanted to be an immanent God in relation to man and thus he constantly appears before men while maintaining his transcendent state in a form of theophany. In a way, God uses a transcendent state as a method for his desire for an immanent state with man.

The transcendent-immanent God of the Old Testament and the absolute transcendent God of the Qur'an affect the relationship between God and his people, as we have already seen through God's relationship with Adam, Abraham, and Moses. Not only is the relationship shown in the Scriptures but also people's thoughts and behaviour differ from one another, which is reflected in the definitions and arguments of systematic theology and the practical life of both Christianity and Islam. These differences in the arguments of systematic theology will be investigated in the next chapter (5) based on the implication of the transcendence of God.