

The Qur'ānic Concept of Apocalypse

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Abstract

This paper attempts to outline the Qur'ānic concept of the long term fate of the universe in comparison to the theoretical scientific explanations. The ultimate cease of the universe and its contents is a matter of fundamental scientific and philosophical importance. Various hypotheses about the ultimate cease of our universe have been suggested. Some of the most important possibilities which intimates the fate of our universe are Big Crunch, Big Rip, Big Freeze and more recently by Higgs boson, sometimes referred to as the "God Particle" etc. All these possibilities suggest that finally the universe expansion will destroy all the celestial bodies or this accelerating universe could expand into an endless vacuum. The Qur'ān does not depict interconnected description of the ultimate fate of the universe. There are verses dispersed throughout Qur'ān which address certain aspects of the universe formation and cease. These scattered verses provide valuable information on the successive events regarding origin and ultimate fate of the universe with varying detail. In order to get a clear idea of universe creation or ultimate cease these scattered verses have to be combined and interpreted. The detail study of these scattered verses clearly reveal that the Qur'ānic concept of apocalypse is perfectly in line with the modern cosmological concept. There are noticeable resemblances between the Qur'ān revelations and the recent findings in the field of Physics and Cosmology. The Qur'ānic concept nevertheless goes far behind the cosmology in reporting the ultimate cease of universe.

Key Words: Qur'ān, universe, cosmological concepts, apocalypse

Introduction

One of the most fascinating things about the universe is how little we really know about universe. Although science trying to explain the future of the universe for as long as man has been able to think about such concepts, but relatively little work has focused on the future of universe. The theoretical explanation of the fate of the universe became possible with general relativity theory of Albert Einstein's (1916).¹ The equation of general relativity have many possible solutions, and every possible solution connotes a possible fate of the universe. Friedmann (1922)² as well as Lemaitre (1927)³ provides several such possibilities regarding the ultimate fate of the universe. Some of most important possibilities which determine the fate of our universe are Big Crunch, Big Rip and Big Freeze ⁴ and more recently by Higgs boson, sometimes referred to as the "God Particle"^{5,6} etc. All these possibilities suggests that ultimately all the stars and galaxies will destroy or the accelerated expansion of the universe could cause an endless void. Space could collapse back in on itself, destroying all celestial bodies in existence, or it

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could expand into an interminable vacuum. All these theories unanimously agree upon that the universe has been expanding as a result of the initial Big Bang.⁷

One of the greatest mysteries in science, the universe created from a point of infinite density and temperature—what's known as the initial singularity. According to Neil Turok⁸ the singularity was not the beginning of time. Time didn't have a beginning, and the Big Bang resulted from a collision of branes, sheet like spaces that exist within a higher-dimensional reality. These collisions might happen repeatedly, creating an eternal, cyclic universe.⁹

Islamic concept of end of universe

As a matter of fact Qur'an is not a book of Physics or Astronomy. According to Dr. Absar Ahmad the main objective of Qur'an is to provide guidance to the mankind so that they may be able to attain salvation on the day of judgement. Alongside there are hints related to specialized philosophical and spiritual realities.¹⁰ These hints are more than enough to shed light on such matters for those with sharpened intellects and spiritual sensibilities.

The Qur'an does not render a coordinated description of the universe' creation or cease. Instead, there are passages dispersed throughout Qur'an which points to the possible creation and ultimate cease of the universe. These scattered verses render information on the successive events of creation and apocalypse with varying detail. To derive a clear picture of possible fate of the universe these fragmented verses have to be brought together. The comparison of the Qur'ānic concept of creation with the modern and most widely accepted concept of Big Bang clearly indicate that Qur'ānic concept is clearly in line with the modern cosmology. One such similarity is the creation of universe from initial singularity, the expansion of universe and then ultimately this expansion causing the end of universe. Referring to creation, Qur'an states in chapter 29: 19-20:

”اللَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ - قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ يُنشِئُ
النَّشْأَةَ الْأُخْرَى إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ“¹¹

Muhammad Sarwar: "Have they not seen how God begins the creation and then turns it back? This is not difficult at all for God. (Muhammad), say to them, travel through the land and see how He has begun the creation and how He will invent the next life. God has power over all things."

”مَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَمَّا أُنذِرُوا مُعْرِضُونَ“¹²

Muhammad Sarwar: “We have created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them ONLY for a genuine purpose and an appointed time. The unbelievers ignore that of which they have been warned.”

These verses of Qur'an rejects any belief of perpetual universe which other theories like steady state and pulsating theory holds. Qur'an states:

”وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدِينَا وَآنَا لَمُوسِعُونَ“¹³

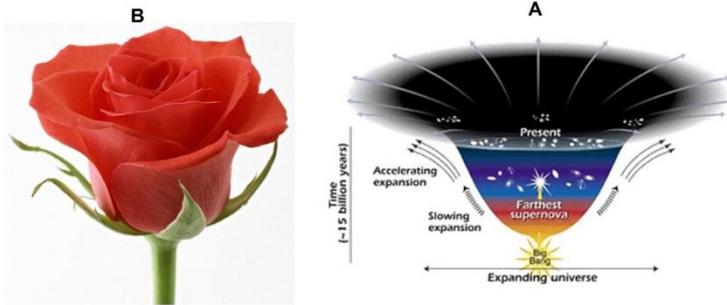
Muhammad Sarwar: “We have made the heaven with our own hand and we expanded it.”

In Sūra al-Raḥmān the Qur'ān states:

“فَإِذَا انشَقَّتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ وَرْدَةً كَالدِّهَانِ”¹⁴

Sahih International: “And when the heaven is split open and becomes rose-colored like oil”

In these verses the word "expanding" is used in the present tense and not in the past which again is in correspondence with the fact that the expansion of the universe is a continuous process. In the second verse Qur'ān explains the universe expansion and illustrates it to an open rose. Figure A is depicting the way cosmologists believe universe is expanding. The cosmologist agree that the universe is expanding like a rose i.e. the outer petals of an opened rose move outward compared to inner petals. Imagine the petals of the opening rose are galaxies and that we are in the center of the rose (universe). Now as the rose open up the further out the outer petals move at a faster rate from the center. This is exactly what is happening in the expanding universe the outer galaxies are receding at the faster rate.



This illustration is comparing the expansion of universe as perceived by cosmologist (A)¹⁵ with the one exemplified in Qur'ān (B) And when the heaven is split open and becomes rose-colored like oil.

Similarly the red color may be pointing toward red shift. Until 1900's, scientist believed that the universe had always been in existence and that the size of the universe is fixed and is not changing.¹⁶ In 1912, the American astronomer, Vesto Slipher, noticed that the galaxies were receding away from us at immense speed. These observations rendered the first proof supporting the idea of expanding-universe. In 1929, Edwin Hubble observation also suggested the expansion of universe. He discovered that the galaxies spectrum is shifting towards red (Red is the longest visible wavelength, A light source traveling away from earth will move into the red spectrum of light or a longer visible wavelength).¹⁷ According to this discovery the galaxies are receding away from one another. This red shift appeared to be larger for faraway galaxies. Hence, the farther a galaxy is, the faster it is receding from Earth.

Similarly it is still believed as stated by steady state theory that all the celestial bodies are everlasting and they were ever fade or decay. Qur'ān states that:

”مَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَمَّا أُنذِرُوا مُعْرِضُونَ“¹⁸

Muhammad Sarwar: “We have created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them only for genuine purpose and for an appointed time. The unbelievers ignore for which they have been warned”

Similarly at another occasion Qur'ān referred to the finite life of stars very clearly in sūra al-mursalāt:

”فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ“¹⁹

Muhammad Sarwar: “Then the star will lose their light”

Until 20th century the cosmologist and physicist were unaware of the reactions taking place inside stars. The theory of Black hole and atomic theory have been proposed recently. Physicist are certain that at the end of life cycle of a star when the internal fuel is consumed and star dies out, it is crumpled into very small object. Stars with thousands of kilometer in diameter can be crumpled roughly into a few kilometer diameter object, referred to as neutron star. In Uttermost case the star can collapse further to an immeasurably dense body or singularity known as Black hole. This discovery of Black holes has been a decisive conformation of Einstein's theory of general relativity.²⁰ A black hole is a star in which an immense amount of matter is packed into a very small area, exhibits such powerful gravitation that nothing-even light can escape.²¹

The above mentioned verses of Qur'ān have clearly mentioned the ultimate fate of stars. According to Qur'ān, stars are there for a certain time and when they finally consume their energy they will fade away.

An article published in Discover magazine Powell (2000) has suggested 20 different possibilities of how the universe could end. One of the possibility is the Rogue black hole, according to Powell the gravity of black hole can swallow everything even the light couldn't escape from its surface. David Bennett of Notre Dame University in Indiana recently spotted two black holes distorting the light of distant stars. Cosmologist confirmed the presence of 10 million black holes in the Milky Way. It is possible that just by passing through the solar system would distort all of the Planets' orbits. Earth might be ejected from the solar system.²²

Similarly the Big Crunch theory suggest that gravitational force will cause the universe to contract until it reaches singularity.²³ Imagine all the galaxies contracting and coming together to create one ultra-massive black hole which contains the mass of the entire universe which eventually collapse the stars, they would start to lose their luster. The wording used by Qur'ān referring to the end of stars is really important: "when the stars have collapsed" 81:2, it probably points towards this big crunch theory. Here, the Qur'ān uses the very precise words:

”وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ“²⁴

Muhammad Sarwar: “ when the stars are made to fade away”

”وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَشَرَتْ“²⁵

Muhammad Sarwar: “When the Stars are dispersed”

”فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ“²⁶

Muhammad Sarwar: “Then the stars will lose their light”

Another emerging possibility presented by cosmologists regarding ultimate fate of the universe is the “Big Rip” theory. According to Big Rip the universe is driven by that mysterious force called “dark energy”, or repulsive gravity. In 1929, Hubble proclaimed a striking discovery which entirely changed the paradigm in the field of astronomy. He observed that the light coming from far off galaxies is shifted toward the red end of the visible spectrum. This fact is commonly known as “Red Shift”, a very strong evidence of accelerating/ expanding universe. This red shift further prove that galaxies are further moving away from us and every galaxy is rushing away from us with a speed which is directly proportional to its distance, this is known as Hubble’s law.²⁷

The furthest galaxies are moving ever further from us and the rate of expansion is accelerating. According to Caldwell²⁸ the universe expansion is so fast that it could tear/pull apart all the objects bounded by gravity. Sūrah, 81 of Qur’an (al-Takwīr: The Overthrowing) verse 3, reports doomsday as follows:

”وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ“²⁹

Sahih International: “And when the mountains are removed”

”وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ“³⁰

Muhammad Sarwar: “And mountains will be like carded wool”

”وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ“³¹

Muhammad Sarwar: “And the mountains become like wool”

At another occasion the Qur’an states:

”وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ“³²

Muhammad Sarwar: “The Mountains will be blown away as dust”

In all of the above verses the Qur’an depicts the gravity and reversal of time. This reversal gravity will convert it into a repulsive force and will induce the earth to blowup. The mountains will collapse and molten lava will be thrown out illuminating the sky. Qur’an describe this as:

”وُحِمْلتِ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ فَدُكَّتْ أَكَّةً وَاحِدَةً“³³

Mohsin Khan: “And the earth and the mountains shall be removed from their places, and crushed with a single crushing”

Similarly describing the explosion of the earth is clearly described in the following verses of Qur’an:

”وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ³⁴ وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ“

Muhammad Sarwar: “When the earth is stretched out, and throws out of itself all that it contains”

”إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا“³⁵

Sahih International: “When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake, and the earth discharges its burdens”

”وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا لَا تَرَى فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا“³⁶

Muhammad Sarwar: “(Muhammad), they will ask you about the mountains. Tell them, "My Lord will grind them to powder and leave them so smoothly levelled. That you will see no depression or elevation in it”

The above verses clearly reveals that on doomsday the earth will explode and throw out all the molten lava to the surface, converting it into shiny smooth lava plain as the lava cool down. There will be no ups and down on earth and its surface will be completely levelled down.

Conclusion

Time and gravity are closely linked. Time passes slightly faster at a mountain top compared to Sea level. Physicists like Steven Hawking (1988)³⁷, Thomas Gold (1962)³⁸ and Michael Berry (1976)³⁹, suggested that time can also reverse if gravity reverses. The gravity reversal will cause everything fall upward rather than downward, Qur'ānic chapter (70) Sūrah al-Ma'ārij (The Ways of Ascent) verse: 9; chapter (77) sūrah al-Mursalāt (Those sent forth) verse: 10) are pointing towards the fact of reversal of time and gravity. The reversal of gravity will convert it into a repulsive force; causing the earth to literally blowup. The mountains and hills will blow away upward and molten lava will be thrown off illuminating the sky like melted copper. Chapter (99) Sūrah al-Zalzalah (The Earthquake) verse 1-2 and chapter (20) Sūrah Ṭāhā, verses 105-107 are referring towards the same.

There is obtrusively noticeable resemblances between the Qur'ān revelations and the recent discoveries in the field of Physics and Cosmology. The Qur'ānic concept of the ultimate fate of the universe is more defined and clear compared to modern cosmology.

Endnotes:

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- ¹² Chapter (46) *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf (The Curved Sand-hills) Verse 3*.
- ¹³ Chapter (51) *Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt (The Wind that Scatter) verse 47*.
- ¹⁴ Chapter (55) *Sūrah al-Raḥmān (The Most Gracious) verse 37*.
- ¹⁵ <http://sports-science2relativity.blogspot.com/2013/03/expanding-niverse.html>
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- ¹⁹ Chapter (77) *Sūrah al-Mursalāt (Those sent forth) Verse 8*.
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- ³⁰ Chapter (101) *Sūrah al-Qāri'ah (The Striking Hour) Verse: 5*.
- ³¹ Chapter (70) *Sūrah al-Ma'ārij (The Ways of Ascent) Verse:9*
- ³² Chapter (77) *Sūrah al-Mursalāt (Those sent forth) Verse: 10*.

³³ Chapter (69) *Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah (The Inevitable), Verse:14*

³⁴ Chapter (84) *Sūrah al-Inshiqāq (The Splitting Asunder) Verse:3-4.*

³⁵ Chapter (99) *Sūrah al-Zalzalah (The Earthquake) Verse 1-2*

³⁶ Chapter (20) *Sūrah Ṭāhā, Verses 105-107.*

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