

THE LIFE BEFORE ADAM: THE PERSPECTIVE OF AL-ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī'S IN *AL-MĪZĀN*

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore life on Earth before Adam was sent down to it. It employs a qualitative method with a focus on thematic analysis from the perspective of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī as presented in his tafsir work, al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān. According to the Iranian exegete, the dialogue between the Angels and Allah recorded in QS. al-Baqarah: 30 indicates the existence of living beings on Earth before the creation of Adam. His interpretation of QS. Fuṣṣilat: 25, QS. al-Nūr: 45, and QS. al-Nisā': 1 reveals the beings that were present prior to Adam's descent, namely jinn, animals, and prehistoric humans categorized within the hominidae family. By applying the thematic analysis, this study finds that al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī rejects the theory of macroevolution of the human body, as reflected in his interpretation of the phrase nafs wāḥidah in QS. al-Nisā': 1. There, he affirms that all humans originated from this one soul, which he identifies as Adam and Eve. In other words, humans today do not have a genealogical connection with any ancient humans, and therefore have never undergone significant changes in their bodies because since Adam, the first human created, he was already in the most perfect physical condition.*

Keywords: *Life Before Adam; Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī; Al-Mīzān.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kehidupan di Bumi sebelum Adam diturunkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan fokus pada analisis tematik dari perspektif *al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī* sebagaimana disajikan dalam karya tafsirnya, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Menurut mufasssīr Iran tersebut, dialog antara para Malaikat dan Allah yang tercatat dalam QS. *al-Baqarah*: 30 menunjukkan keberadaan makhluk hidup di Bumi sebelum penciptaan Adam. Penafsirannya terhadap QS. *Fuṣṣilat*: 25, QS. *al-Nūr*: 45, dan QS. *al-Nisā*: 1 mengungkapkan makhluk-makhluk yang ada sebelum Adam diturunkan, yaitu jin, hewan, dan manusia prasejarah yang dikategorikan dalam famili hominidae. Dengan menerapkan analisis tematik, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa *al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī* menolak teori makroevolusi tubuh manusia, sebagaimana tercermin dalam interpretasinya terhadap frasa *naḥs wāḥidahin* dalam QS. *al-Nisā*: 1. Di sana, ia menegaskan bahwa semua manusia berasal dari satu jiwa ini, yang ia identifikasi sebagai Adam dan Hawa. Dengan kata lain, manusia saat ini tidak memiliki hubungan genealogis dengan manusia purba mana pun, dan oleh karena itu tidak pernah mengalami perubahan signifikan dalam tubuh mereka karena sejak Adam.

Kata Kunci: Kehidupan Sebelum Adam; *Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī*; *Al-Mizān*.

Introduction

The account of the creation of the first human in the Qur'an is preceded by a prior event—when the angels questioned God's decision, as recorded in QS. *al-Baqarah*: 30. This is evident from the angel's words: "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption and sheds blood?" indicating that there were already creatures inhabiting the Earth before Adam was created. According to some scholars, the beings who lived before Adam were humans who lacked rational potential. Thanks to the faculty of reason, a being possessing it can adapt well to its environment and develop knowledge. This ability first emerged in *Homo Sapiens*. Harari refers to the emergence of this rational potential as the cognitive revolution.¹ This aligns with what Zulfan Taufik stated—that God granted humans superiority over other creatures in terms of their spirituality and intellect, which is why He appointed them as stewards (*khalifah*) on Earth.²

The mechanism behind the formation of modern humans remains a puzzling mystery. Since humans were not witnesses to their own creation, they can only speculate through research and discoveries believed to be remnants indicating how the process of creation unfolded. Initially, people believed in the origin of the first human based on myths. For example, there is a story that humanity's ancestors came from five strands of hair dropped by the Supreme Deity into a river, which then transformed into the first humans. Another myth tells of the first human emerging from fragments of a giant's body that originated in outer space.³

In contrast, according to science, the history before the emergence of

the first modern human (*homo sapiens*) has been constructed by experts through various discoveries identified as relics from ancient times. Scientists believe that humans began to appear on Earth during the Pleistocene epoch and then underwent evolution in response to environmental conditions and human needs. During this evolutionary process, the human brain increased in size, followed by changes in body posture, and the shape of hands and feet. The development into *homo sapiens*, humans who utilize their intellect, went through multiple stages and took a long period. It is estimated that *homo sapiens* emerged around 500,000 years ago.⁴

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his masterpiece *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, indicates the existence of life before the first human was sent down to Earth in his interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah: 30.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا
وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Regarding this verse, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that the dialogue between God and the angels, as recorded in the verse, indicates the presence of creatures who had already inhabited the earth before Adam was created. This is seen in the angels' question to God: "Will You place upon it one who spreads corruption and sheds blood?" According to the Iranian exegete, the angels' question was not asked without basis; rather, it stemmed from their knowledge and prior experience regarding creatures and what they had done on earth.⁵

This research aims to revisit and explore the narrative of life on Earth before the arrival of Adam. If *khalīfah* means vicegerent, caretaker, or successor, then does it imply that the earth had no such figure before Adam's presence? Based on the explanation in the previous paragraph, the answer is yes—there were such beings. However, they caused corruption and shed blood on the earth, which is why God appointed Adam and his descendants as their successors, better suited to be its stewards.

This study is a qualitative research project, which is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from the observed behavior of individuals.⁶ It is categorized as qualitative because it involves data collection and narrative analysis with the aim of enriching the data, understanding a specific case that is the subject of study, and thereby gaining deeper insight and discovering more specific findings related to the research.

This study employs thematic analysis, which is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes that emerge from the data. This method enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings within

the collected data, making it a suitable approach for this research. The object of this study is Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to the theme, such as QS. al-Baqarah: 30, QS. al-Nisā': 1, QS. al-Nūr: 45, and QS. Fuṣṣilat: 25. Other verses cited beyond those mentioned serve as supportive evidence, explanatory aids, or points of comparison.

Indications of Pre-Adam Life on Earth

As explained in the introduction, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's openness to the topic of the existence of creatures that lived on Earth before Adam is indicated in his interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah: 30. In interpreting this verse, the scholars are divided into two groups. The first group consists of those who adopt the stance of *tafwīd*, meaning they entrust the meaning of the verse entirely to Allah. That is, what occurred (the dialogue between Allah and the angels) is known only to Allah. Humans may only understand, in general, that the verse explains the special status of humanity and its position as the enforcer of Allah's laws on Earth.⁷ The second group, meanwhile, argues that the dialogue between Allah and the angels in QS. al-Baqarah: 30 is a parable—a metaphor for the understanding of the being that Allah intended to create and the special qualities He would bestow upon it.⁸ Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī belongs to the second group because he seeks to explain the meaning behind the dialogue between the angels and the Lord of the universe

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains why the angels seemed surprised and questioned God's decision. He defines *khalīfah* as a representative of Allah. That is, the creature appointed as *khalīfah* would represent God in managing and establishing prosperity on Earth. The angels knew that God possesses glorious names, exalted attributes, vast mercy, and great power, untouched by deficiency, fault, weakness, or chaos. So, how could a creature with so many flaws and weaknesses represent God on Earth?⁹

Regarding the phrase *innī a'lamu mā lā ta'lamūn* (Indeed, I know what you do not know), al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains it in two aspects. First, that the being to be created is not a replacement for a previous *khalīfah*, because Allah states in the next verse *wa 'allama Ādam al-asmā' kullahā* (and He taught Adam the names of all things), indicating that Adam is a new creature with new knowledge.¹⁰

This aligns with al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of the next verse, stating that *'allama* in verse 31 implies divine knowledge granted either directly or through the intermediary of Jibril. Al-Qurṭubī also quotes the *ṣūfi* scholars, who interpret the teaching as both memorization of names and understanding how to care for those things in ways pleasing

to Allah. According to al-Qurṭubī, this knowledge was given to Adam in both general and specific forms.¹¹

Second, Allah does not refute the angel's calculation that the new creature would cause corruption. Nor does He deny that the angels are always obedient, worshipping and glorifying Him. However, Allah highlights one aspect the angels could not fulfill—the ability to bear the trust (*amānah*), which only the being chosen as *khalīfah* could uphold. God's gift to humans outweighs the damage and bloodshed that may occur. He demonstrated this through a test of intellect between the angels and Adam. First, Allah asked the angels to name the objects He presented, “*thumma ‘araḍahum ‘alā al-malā’ikah fa qāla anbi’ūnī bi asmā’ hā’ulā in kuntum ṣādiqīn*” (Then He presented them to the angels and said, “Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful”). When the angels could not respond, Allah turned to Adam, who then correctly named the objects, prompting Allah to say, “*qāla alam aqul lakum innī a‘lamu ghayb al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ wa a‘lamu mā lā ta‘lamūn*”.¹²

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī was not the first to suggest the possibility of beings existing before Adam, based on the angels' question regarding whether the new creation would cause corruption and bloodshed. This idea had also been alluded to by Ibn Kathīr, who cited Qatādah, stating that the angels knew of previous beings who caused corruption on Earth, and this knowledge led to their question. Yet, their question was not a protest, but a request for clarification.¹³ Many Islamic historical sources and hadiths mention that numerous “Adams” had been created before. Miṣbāḥ Muṣṭafā quotes Ibn ‘Arabi, citing a narration from Ibn ‘Abbās, in which the Prophet Muhammad said, “Indeed, Allah created 200,000 Adams”.¹⁴

Mukti Ali writes that not only was there a *khalīfah* on Earth before Adam's descent, but also before his creation itself. He claims that classical Islamic scholars believed there were beings who lived on Earth for thousands of years prior to Adam.¹⁵ Mashuri and Romadon, in their article “*Khalīfah on Earth Before Prophet Adam (Thematic Interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 30)*”, concluded that the *khalīfah* had already existed on Earth, had multiplied, and developed civilizations, the remnants of which have been discovered and identified by archaeologists.¹⁶

In Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī's interpretation of QS. al-Nisā': 1, he dedicates a special section titled *Kalām fī ‘Umr al-Naw’ al-Insānī wa al-Insān al-‘Ulā* (Discussion on the Age of the Human Species and the First Human). In this section, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī not only indicates the possible existence of humans before Adam, but also allows for the presence of other human-like beings, such as fossils, remains, and artifacts found by scientists. However,

he believes the explanations provided by scientists are still unsatisfactory due to the absence of a genealogical link between prehistoric humans and modern humans. According to him, it is possible that various human species appeared on Earth, multiplied, lived, and then died; and that this cycle of emergence and extinction continued through several stages until the emergence of our current lineage.¹⁷

Creatures that Existed on Earth Before the Arrival of Adam

Regarding of Qs. al-Baqarah: 30, Muhammad Basil Altaie, a professor of quantum cosmology at Yarmouk University, explains that the verse indicates the angels had prior experience or knowledge about such a being. However, the being in question could have been an animal or something else.¹⁸ This aligns with scientific views suggesting that living beings have inhabited earth for as long as 600 million years. These organisms reproduced, exchanged substances, had integrated body systems, could move in various ways, transmit information, and possessed survival capabilities.¹⁹

Ibn ‘Āshūr also stated that the descendants of Adam were not the first creatures to set foot on Earth. He referred to humans as *al-ḥayyan ibn al-bayyan*, meaning beings whose exact nature is unknown. This view was influenced by the beliefs of the ancient Persians and Greeks, who held that there were pre-human beings on earth called *al-Tamm* and *al-Ramm*.²⁰ There is also a narration that suggests beings had inhabited the Earth long before the lineage of Adam. However, does the phrase “200,000 Adams” in the hadith refer to primitive humans as described by science, or to beings of another kind? Hopefully, the upcoming discussion will shed light on this question.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s interpretation of QS. Fuṣṣilat: 25, QS. al-Nūr: 45, and QS. al-Nisā’: 1 reveals the types of beings that existed before Adam’s descent: jinn, animals, and—according to the Iranian exegete—prehistoric humans belonging to the *hominidae* family. The information concerning the existence of jinn prior to the human race is found in his interpretation of QS. Fuṣṣilat: 25.

وَقَيَّضْنَا لَهُمْ قُرَنَاءَ فَزَيَّنُوا لَهُمْ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَحَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ
خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا خَاسِرِينَ

“And We assigned to them companions who made attractive to them what was before them and what was behind them, and the word [of punishment] has come into effect upon them along with nations who passed away before them of the jinn and humankind. Indeed, they were losers.”

In the phrase *wa qayyadnā lahum quranā* (and We assigned to them companions), al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī cites an opinion stating that Allah replaced their sincere companions with evil ones from among the jinn and humans. However, those who were meant to accompany them in righteousness failed to carry out Allah's command. He also cites an interpretation of the phrase *fazayyanū lahum mā bayna aydihim wa mā khalafahum*, explaining that the wrongdoings they witnessed were imitated, and they followed the behaviors of those who came after them.²¹ This view seems to reflect the behavior of beings prior to Adam, who were inclined toward vile deeds.

As for the phrase *wa ḥaqqa 'alayhim al-qawlu fi umam qad khalat min qablihim min al-jinn wa al-ins*, it refers to the decree of punishment that destroyed them, just as it did the previous nations—whether from among the jinn or humans. The verse ends with the phrase *innahum kānū khāsirīn* (indeed, they were losers), emphasizing that they truly committed blameworthy acts. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī also states that this verse shows that the fate of the jinn is similar to that of humans: they are rewarded for good deeds and punished for bad ones during their lifetimes. It was the evil actions of pre-Adamic beings that led to their destruction.²²

The ancestor of the jinn is *Abū Jann* (the Father of the jinn), just as humans descend from Adam, who is known as *Abū al-Bashar*. The *Banū al-Jann* were the second inhabitants of the Earth before the human generation, and Iblis was the fourth generation of the jinn.²³ Like Adam, Abū Jann was granted a spouse, and they reproduced and spread across the Earth. By the time of the future Iblis—Azazil—the jinn had populated various regions and formed eight kingdoms on Earth. These eight kingdoms were ruled by Iblis's siblings, while Azazil himself lived in the heavens and had no kingdom, despite being the most devout of the jinn and regarded as their leader. Eventually, conflict erupted among them, and they began to annihilate each other. Allah then sent a host of angels led by Azazil himself to fight the jinn. The jinn fled to islands, mountains, and seas. After the battle ended and Earth became peaceful once again, Allah created Adam.²⁴

This narrative supports the argument that the jinn existed on Earth before humans. Besides Ibn Kathīr, other scholars also recorded similar accounts. For example, the scholar titled *Sayyid 'Ulamā' al-Ḥijāz*, al-Nawawī al-Bantanī, quoted a narration from Ḍahhāk, citing Ibn 'Abbās in his tafsir *Marah Labīd*. It recounts that after Iblis was created and his kind began to spread corruption and bloodshed, Allah sent an angelic army to destroy the rebellious jinn. Once peace was restored, Adam was created.²⁵

A similar narration was quoted by 'Imāduddīn from Ibn 'Abbās: "There were early creatures who inhabited the Earth, known as *al-Ḥinn* and *al-*

Binn. Then came the jinn, who initially worshiped Allah for a long time, but eventually fell into corruption. Allah sent them a prophet from among their own kind—his name was Yusuf. However, they disobeyed and killed him. Then Allah sent angels to banish them to the seas. Their period on Earth lasted one thousand years”.²⁶

The exact duration of the jinn’s residence on Earth remains uncertain. Al-Ālūsī does not specify how long they lived, only noting that they dwelled on Earth for a long time before their corruption led Allah to send angels to drive them into the mountains and islands.²⁷ However, Ibn Kathīr provides a more precise timeline, stating that the jinn lived peacefully for two thousand years before engaging in wickedness on Earth.²⁸

In addition to the jinn, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī seemingly does not deny the presence of animals on Earth before Adam’s descent, as reflected in his interpretation of QS. al-Nūr: 45.

وَلِلّٰهِ خَلْقُ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ مِّن مَّاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ رِجْلَيْنِ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ لِلّٰهِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ لِلّٰهِ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“And Allah has created every [living] creature from water. Of them are some that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four. Allah creates whatever He wills. Indeed, Allah is Most Capable of everything.”

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains that this verse clarifies how Allah creates creatures according to His will. Allah created various animals from water and granted each type its own uniqueness. One example of this uniqueness is the way animals move: some crawl on their bellies (like snakes), others walk on two legs (like apes, humans, and birds), and some walk on four legs (such as donkeys). In this verse, Allah only mentions these three types, although there are animals with other characteristics as well. The phrase *yakhluqu Allāh mā yashā’*—according to al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī—is a confirmation of the previous sentence, which speaks of the uniqueness of each creature even though they were all created from the same material, namely water.²⁹ It seems that in this verse, Allah intends to show that the matter of creation is His exclusive right. In other words, Allah has the right to create something unique in His creation or to make what is specific into something general.

In science, particularly in the fields of paleontology and zooarchaeology, it is stated that most animals in the past were many times larger than those living today and had dominated the land for more than 140 million years—among them, the dinosaurs, which belong to the reptile group. Vertebrate animals (those with backbones) classified under the Order Chordata are also believed by scientists to have existed as early as 500 million years ago.³⁰

Around 300 million years later, a group of vertebrates emerged called mammals, or milk-producing animals. These creatures had relatively larger brains and more developed senses. They had new characteristics, such as the ability to chew and to produce sound using their throats. Mammals include an order known as Primates, which encompasses Prosimii—animals like monkeys, lorises, and even early humans are included in this category.³¹ Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's explanation regarding verse 45 of QS. al-Nūr does not contradict scientific explanations. It confirms that Allah creates animals according to His will. In this context, Allah indeed has the power to grant each of His creatures unique traits or identities and to help ancient creatures survive according to their time and habitat.

Aside from the aforementioned animals, science has also revealed the presence of prehistoric humans, although not all Muslim scholars consider these to be actual humans. These beings are referred to as *al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq* (rational or thinking animals). Those who deny their human status argue that these creatures did not yet possess cognitive abilities. In QS al-Nūr: 45, Allah uses the term *dābbah*, which Edward William Lane interprets as “a creature, whether rational or irrational”.³² From Lane's interpretation of *dābbah*, we can conclude that *man yamshī 'alā rijlayn* (those that walk on two legs and were created from water) refers specifically to humans, as humans are the only purely bipedal and rational creatures. Shanavas argues that this is why modern humans (*homo sapiens*) are grouped into the same kingdom (*homo*) as other prehistoric humans.³³

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation regarding the existence of prehistoric humans appears in his commentary on QS. al-Nisā': 1.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَتَقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَلَا رَحِمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

“O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it He created its mate, and from them both He spread many men and women. So fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and maintain family ties. Verily Allah is ever an Observer over you.”

In interpreting QS. al-Nisā': 1, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī presents a discussion entitled *Kalām fī 'Umr al-Naw' al-Insānī wa al-Insān al-Ūlā* (A Discourse on the Age of the Human Species and the First Human). At the beginning of this discussion, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī cites a view derived from Judaism stating that the age of the current human species is approximately 7,000 years. Of course, this view is not aligned with the findings of geologists, who assert that the age of the human species spans millions of years based on discoveries of fossils and ancient artifacts. However, according to al-

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, their explanations are not strong because they lack clarity on the continuity of the lineage between the ancient human species that lived millions of years ago and modern humans. In other words, the lineage is disconnected, and indirectly, this Shi'a exegete suggests that modern humans are not the same as prehistoric humans. According to him, it is possible that a human species emerged on Earth, multiplied, and then went extinct; then a new human species appeared and repeated this cycle until the race of Adam appeared and has endured to this day.³⁴

This aligns with what Hamka conveyed in his tafsir, quoting a narration from al-Ālūsī, which states that the interval between each Adam is 1,000 years. After the 30th Adam, there was an interval of 50,000 years before the world was destroyed and perished. Earth became populated again 50,000 years later, after which Allah created Adam as narrated in QS. al-Baqarah: 30.³⁵

La'ribi, a Doctor of Comparative Religion from the University of Algeria, states that the time between Adam and modern humans in the year 2024 AD is approximately 10,000 years. La'ribi calculated this based on the estimated time of the great flood experienced by the people of Noah, which has been widely researched and is believed to have occurred around 7,000 BC. This was proposed by geologists William Ryan and Walter Pitman in 1990. They found evidence of a massive flood in the Dead Sea and believe that the area was dry land—an inland freshwater lake located several hundred meters below sea level and separated from the Mediterranean Sea by the Bosphorus Strait and a large landmass.³⁶

In 2012, Robert Ballard, an archaeologist from Bahrain, conducted further research in this area (the Dead Sea) and came to similar conclusions. A video on abcnews.go.com showed footage of building structures resembling human-made constructions and ancient pottery artifacts submerged beneath the Dead Sea.³⁷ The distance between Noah and Adam is 1,000 years, based on a hadith from the Prophet stating: "Between Adam and Noah there were ten generations..." So we know that the time between Adam and Jesus is 8,000 years, assuming one generation spans 100 years. Adding the current Gregorian year results in a total of approximately 10,000 years since Adam.³⁸

Meanwhile, it is known that *homo sapiens* has existed for around 300,000 years, based on the discovery of human remains in Morocco in 2017. Therefore, Adam, who lived about 10,000 years ago, coexisted with *homo sapiens* of that era. Upon learning the age of human-like creatures that predated Adam, a new question arises: "Does this mean Adam is not the father of all humans alive today?" Rashīd Riḍā quoted the

opinion of his teacher, Muhammad ‘Abduh, in his tafsir *al-Manār*, stating that the term *nafs wāḥidah* (a single soul) here does not necessarily refer solely to Adam. According to this modern Muslim thinker, the next part of the verse, *rijālān kathīran wa nisā’an* (many men and women), uses an indefinite form that conveys a general meaning. ‘Abduh argues that if the verse intended to state that all humans today descended from Adam and Eve, the wording should have been: *wa baththa minhumā jamī‘ al-rijāl wa al-nisā’* (and He spread from them all the men and women). Rashīd Riḍā then posed the question, “How can it refer to a specific individual while addressing all of humanity?”³⁹

Regarding the term *nafs wāḥidah*, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī holds a different view. For him, *nafs wāḥidah* definitely refers to Adam and his wife, Eve. He explains that the word *al-nafs* linguistically means ‘*ayn al-shay’* (the very essence of something). He provides an example: the sentence *jā’anī fulān nafsuḥū* is equivalent to *jā’anī fulān ‘aynuḥū*, both meaning “so-and-so came to me in person”.⁴⁰ Therefore, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that all humans come from the same type, because the beginning of the verse addresses humanity in general, as Allah says: *yā ayyuhā al-nās* (O mankind) ... *rabbakum alladhī khalaqakum min al-nafs al-wāḥidah* (your Lord who created you from a single soul). Thus, he concludes that all present-day humans originate from the same ancestors, namely Adam and Eve. To support his view, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī cites other verses: QS. al-Zumar: 6, QS. al-A’rāf: 27, and QS. al-Isrā’: 62.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī states that what is meant by *al-nafs al-wāḥidah* (the single soul) is that absolutely all humans, both men and women, originated from the same pair of human beings. Thus, the meaning of the verse is: *khalaqa kull wāḥid minkum min ab wa umm bashariyyīn min ghayr farq fī dhālik baynakum* — “each one of you was created from a human father and mother without any distinction among you”.⁴¹

This interpretation aligns with QS. al-Ḥujurāt: 13, which clearly rejects the notion of difference between individuals. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female. Then We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely, the most noble among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

However, according to the Iranian exegete, there is a difference in

meaning between QS. al-Ḥujurāt: 13 and QS. al-Nisā': 1. QS. Al-Ḥujurāt: 13 explains human unity based on the essence of humanity and negates any differences in terms of their origins. Meanwhile, QS. al-Nisā': 1 emphasizes human unity based on origin — even though humanity has grown significantly in number and spread into various tribes around the world, they still share a common ancestral lineage.⁴² This aligns with the meaning of the verse in QS. al-Nisā' itself: *wa baththa minhumā rijālan kathīran wa nisā'an* (and [Allah] spread from the two of them many men and women).

Al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥāhānī explains that one of every two paired animals, whether male or female, is called *zawj*. Similarly, two pairs of inanimate objects such as shoes or sandals are also called *zawj*. Anything that is interconnected, whether by similarity or opposition, is also referred to as *zawj*.⁴³ Hence, the phrase *wa khalaqa minhā zawjahā* (and He created from it its mate) means that every pair of humankind originated from *al-nafs al-wāḥidah*, or the single soul, because Adam and his wife were a pair. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī further explains another meaning of the word *zawj*, which is a part or fragment of something, meaning that each pair was created from a portion of that one thing. This view aligns with the narration stating that Allah created Adam's wife from one of Adam's ribs.⁴⁴ What Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī means is that the rib used to create Eve was a part of Adam's body, and therefore the *zawj* or mate is a part of the other's body.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī again emphasizes that the meaning of verse 1 from QS. Al-Nisā' is that the entire human lineage currently in existence traces back to Adam and his wife, without any other beings involved. This view is based on his understanding of the verse segment where Allah says *wa baththa minhumā rijālan kathīr wa nisā'an* (and He spread from the two of them many men and women), and not *wa baththa minhumā wa min ḡhayrihimā* (and He spread from them and from others).⁴⁵ Thus, a contrast emerges between the first opinion — that of La'ribi and Rashīd Riḍā — which allows for the possibility that Adam lived among prehistoric humans who were still alive at that time (implying not all humans today descend from Adam), and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's firm stance that all human beings today descend from Adam and Eve.

He then elaborates on two implications of this view: First, the meaning of *rijālan kathīran wa nisā'an* is that all humans are descendants of Adam and his wife without any intermediaries, as if it were said: *wa baththakum minhumā ayyuhā al-nās* (and He multiplied you from them, O mankind). Second, the multiplication without intermediaries after Adam and Eve occurred among their sons and daughters, at a time when

the only males and females in existence were within their own family. The intermarriage between siblings among Adam's children did not have negative consequences as it would today because such matters fall under divine law (*sharī'ah*), and it is Allah's right to permit such circumstances as He did for Adam's family.⁴⁶ As affirmed by several verses, such as: QS. al-Ra'd: 41, QS. Yūsuf: 40, QS. al-Kahf: 26, and QS. al-Qaṣṣaṣ: 70.

Then, in al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation of QS. al-A'rāf: 27, in the phrase *kama akhrajā abawaykum* (just as he expelled your parents), it is clear that humanity descends from a single pair of ancestors, namely Adam and Eve, who were both human beings. In the phrase *wa khalaqa minhā zawjahā* from QS. al-Nisā': 1, which literally means "and He created from it its spouse," this indicates that every pair comes from a single species, with specific traits of that species, and what is born from it must be of the same species as well.⁴⁷ This is also the reason why al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī rejects Darwin's theory of evolution, particularly macroevolution, or what he refers to as "brutal evolution." He argues that it is impossible for ape parents to give birth to a *Homo sapiens*.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's View on Human Biological Evolution

According to Mai, the term "evolution" in general refers to a change from heterogeneity toward homogeneity and a development or transformation that gradually leads to progress. Specifically, evolution is an adaptive improvement process that increases the likelihood of survival for a species, culture, or individual.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, biological evolution refers to evolutionary processes studied through research involving various fossil findings using multiple approaches, such as genetics, paleontology, microbiology, physiology, and others.⁴⁹

In biological evolution theory, microevolution and macroevolution are two key concepts that describe the changes in organisms over time. Microevolution refers to small-scale changes in allele frequencies within a population from one generation to the next. These changes can occur through several mechanisms, such as genetic mutation, natural selection, gene flow, and genetic drift.⁵⁰ Microevolution takes place over relatively short time periods and can be observed within a human lifetime. For example, bacterial resistance to antibiotics or color variation in certain insects.

On the other hand, macroevolution refers to large-scale evolutionary changes that occur over very long time periods. This process includes the formation of new species (speciation), mass extinctions, adaptive radiations, and major changes in the structure and classification of organisms.⁵¹

Macroevolution is essentially the cumulative result of continuous microevolutionary processes over long periods of time. In other words, microevolution serves as the foundation for macroevolution.⁵² Although both share the same basic mechanisms, macroevolution emphasizes broader impacts on organism lineages and the taxonomic structure of life on Earth.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's discussion on this topic can be found in his commentary on verse 1 of QS. al-Nisā', under the section titled *Kalām fi Anna al-Insān Naw' Mustaqil: Ghayr Mutahawwul min Naw' Ākhar* (Discussion on Man as a Separate Being: Not Evolved from Another Species). According to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, this verse is sufficient to affirm that Adam and his wife were created from soil and are completely different from other species. In this part, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī sharply criticizes theories that propose humans originate from other species, commonly known as evolution theory. Although many proponents of evolution exist, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī particularly rejects any form of macro-evolution concerning the human body. The Shi'a mufasssir argues that what scientists claim—that humans are animals that have transformed into humans—is merely a hypothesis lacking strong evidence. This hypothesis does not examine the process of one species evolving into another but only studies visible physical characteristics.⁵³

His views also appear in his commentary on QS. al-Sajdah: 7-9. In this commentary, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī discusses the *existence of the first human* (*Kalām fi kawniyyah al-Insān al-Ūlā*). He firmly states that Adam is a human being created without a father or mother, and the Qur'an clearly mentions that he was created from dust, clay, or the essence of soil, as various verses describe.⁵⁴ However, a full explanation of Adam's origins from the Qur'anic perspective needs to be elaborated by an expert in Islamic sciences to address external challenges. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī then formulates key questions to answer these challenges: Was Adam a human born from another species? Was Adam a perfect human born from an ancient, non-rational human species? Was Adam an imperfect being who then reproduced with his wife to give birth to rational humans?

Regarding the first question, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's answer is no. Adam, as the father of mankind, was created by Allah from soil and without parents. This view is based on several Qur'anic verses: QS. al-Sajdah: 7-9 explain that Adam's creation began from soil, unlike his descendants who were created from male sperm fertilizing a female egg, QS. Āli 'Imrān: 59 states that Adam was created without a father or mother, similar to how Jesus ('Isa) was created without a father, and QS. al-Nisā': 1, where the phrase *min nafs wahidah* (from a single soul) affirms that all humans come

from the same ancestor—Adam and his wife.

Second, was Adam born as an individual from a species without intellect, then became an intelligent individual? Again, the answer is no, considering the above points. Third, was Adam an imperfect creature who reproduced to produce perfect offspring? No, because al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets the meaning of *khalifah* in QS. al-Baqarah: 30, explaining that Adam was not a replacement for a previous *khalifah* but rather a trusted being appointed by Allah to manage the earth according to His command. Allah's statement *wa 'allama Ādam al-Asmā' kullahā* (and He taught Adam all the names) indicates that Adam was a new being endowed with knowledge.

Still in the same section, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes a view that interprets the verses on human creation and *al-Sajdah* as referring to Adam as *al-naw'ī* (a species or type), not *al-shakhsī* (an individual). This suggests the absoluteness of humanity's origin is from soil, while Adam is the start of human lineage. This view seems to draw from QS. al-A'raf: 11.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرَكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَكَةِ سَجُدُوا لِيءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

"Indeed, We created you (Adam) and then We shaped you; then We told the angels, 'Prostrate to Adam.' So they prostrated, except for Iblis, who refused."

According to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, this verse contains information that the angels were commanded to prostrate to the being designated by God for them through the act of creation and the formation of the body. This verse, according to those who hold this view, indicates that the intended being consists of many individuals and not just one specific human individual.⁵⁵ However, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī later rejects the opinion that the being in question refers to such a species. According to him, this contradicts the apparent (*zāhir*) meaning of other verses. As recounted in QS. Ṣād:

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتُ بِإِيْدِي أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنْ لَّعَالِينَ (٧٥)
قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ (٧٦) قَالَ فَخْرُجْ مِنْهَا فَإِنَّكَ رَجِيمٌ
(٧٧) وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكَ لَعْنَتِي إِلَى يَوْمِ الدِّينِ (٧٨) قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنْظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (٧٩) قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنْظَرِينَ (٨٠) إِلَى يَوْمِ لَوْقَتِ لِمَعْلُومٍ (٨١) قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ
(٨٢) إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ لِمُخْلَصِينَ (٨٣)

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains his reason for rejecting the previous interpretation after observing how Allah switches from the singular form in verse 76 to the plural form in verse 82.⁵⁶ In verse 76, Iblis says "I am better than him,"

using the third-person masculine singular pronoun, which clearly refers to Adam. Meanwhile, in verse 82, Iblis vows throughout his life to mislead “them,” using the third-person masculine plural pronoun, which refers to many people. From this, it is understood that Iblis intends to mislead both Adam and his descendants until the appointed time.⁵⁷

Thus, it can be seen that al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī aligns with the group that rejects the idea that the human race, including Adam, is the result of macroevolution from another species. This is because humans existing today are believed to be the descendants of Adam, whom Iblis continuously strives to mislead.

Conclusion

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, in his interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah: 30, does not deny the existence of humans or creatures that lived in ancient times. According to him, the dialogue between the angels and Allah in this verse indicates that there were living beings on Earth before Adam was created. The angels’ question to their Lord was based on their knowledge about those creatures, who previously on Earth were known for committing vile acts and shedding blood.

In his exegesis of QS. Fuṣṣilat: 25, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī affirms that jinn inhabited the Earth prior to the descent of Adam. In interpreting QS. al-Nūr: 45, he explains that Allah created a variety of animals with differing physical forms tailored to their respective needs for survival. Accordingly, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not negate the existence of prehistoric animals during that period. And regarding QS. al-Nisā’: 1, he likewise does not deny the existence of beings classified within the Hominidae family. He acknowledges that the discovery of ancient human fossils is irrefutable, as it has been substantiated by scientific evidence. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that the creation of Adam was a unique and special act, not derived from prehistoric humans nor resulting from their evolutionary lineage.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s interpretation of QS. al-Nisā’: 1 and QS. al-Sajdah: 7 states that he does not agree with the idea that the first human resulted from the evolution of other species. He firmly asserts that scientific data is still insufficient to prove that humans originated from other species and believes in the truth conveyed by the Qur’an that Adam is a being whose creation was completely different, even though previous creatures may have shared physical similarities with Adam.

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