

The Concept of the "The World of *Dharr*": A Re-examination of Interpreters View on Verse ١٧٢ of Surah *al-A'rāf*

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Abstract

Verse ١٧٢ of the Holy Quran, Surah *al-A'rāf*, is considered one of the foundational verses in Islamic thought. This verse speaks of a covenant and a promise that God Almighty made with human beings and asked them to fulfill. Islamic scholars, generally relying on certain narrations, have mentioned a concept called the "The World of *Dharr*" in the context of this verse. Although this concept is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran itself, its early presence in a diverse range of hadith, exegetical, theological, and mystical discourses in the early Islamic centuries indicates its importance. Despite the extensive research that has been conducted on this concept in general and specifically in the context of Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A'rāf*, there are still serious disagreements about it. The present study aims to analyze the narrations that are the source of this concept in order to deconstruct it. It also critiques the exegetical views using an approach of "Quran-by-Quran" exegesis and concludes that: first, Verse ١٧٢ of Surah *al-A'rāf* is structurally similar to other verses that emphasize the divine covenant taken from prophets, the Children of Israel, the Children of Adam, etc.. Second, contrary to what is widely

believed, no confirmation of the aforementioned concept can be found in this holy verse.

Keywords: Holy Quran, Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A‘rāf*, *The world of Dharr*, Concept, Interpreters.

Introduction

Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A‘rāf* "And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify against themselves, [saying], 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] was so you would not say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware,'" describes a covenant or a promise that God Almighty took from human beings, which is also referred to as the verse of "*Dharr*" or the verse of "*Alastu*" in various texts.

This verse has long been a subject of attention for Muslim exegetes, mystics, theologians, and philosophers. The verse refers to a supernatural and spiritual event in which God took a testimony of His Lordship from all of humanity's descendants before they entered this world. Although this verse highlights the importance of human acknowledgment of God in the issue of moral responsibility and the Day of Judgment, the nature of the event, its circumstances, the type of existence of the progeny, the manner of their testimony, and its relationship with the issue of human freedom have always been a source of ambiguity and intellectual and interpretive challenges. These fundamental questions have sometimes led to contradictory or incompatible viewpoints in exegetical and philosophical texts. The main challenge here is that a comprehensive and coherent view that can present all exegetical, theological, mystical, and philosophical dimensions of this verse within a logical and consistent framework with Islamic principles has not yet been formed.

Therefore, this study attempts to use a history of concepts approach to review the intellectual currents and existing viewpoints in Islamic texts to clarify the ambiguities and interpretive knots surrounding the understanding and interpretation of the verse. This approach not only helps to resolve the interpretive challenges of this verse but also seeks to examine the issue of the verse's indication of the "The World of *Dharr*" with the help of a contemplative understanding and Quranic evidence to clarify whether the existence of the "The World of *Dharr*" and the testimony of the children of Adam to God's truth and Lordship in that world can be proven based on this verse. It also examines what views and interpretations of the verse have been formed among Muslim exegetes based on the history of concepts.

١. Research Background

A look at the works of Islamic scholars on this holy verse also shows that the first attempts to discover the connection of the verse's concepts were made by hadith scholars. After that, exegetes, theologians, and mystics each tried to analyze the verse from various angles. Contemporary Quranic scholars have also produced extensive research in this area. For example, Qadardan Qaramaleki, by presenting five theories on the understanding and interpretation of the verse, considers the theory of a number of Muslim philosophers and mystics, such as *Ibn Sīnā*, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, and *Ibn ‘Arabī*, to be suitable for understanding the verse because they believed in the worlds of *Mulk*, *Malakūt*, *Mithāl*, *‘Aql*, and *Nafs* (Qadardan Qaramaleki, ٤٥-٥٧).

Mostafaei and Kabir, after examining and critiquing seven theories, ultimately found the theory of the "Positive-internalist" group more suitable. This group believes that the "*The world of Dharr*" exists and is related to the internal and spiritual aspect of this world. However, in the conclusion of their discussion, they

tried to combine and integrate all the theories except for the "Positive-externalist" one, which presents the reader with two different approaches (Mostafaei and Kabir, "The nature of The World of *Dharr*, with a review and critique of related theories," ٤٩-٧٠).

Soltani discussed the concept of *al-Alast* from the perspective of mystics up to the eighth century AH and also made references to the views of exegetes, hadith scholars, mystics, and poets in this regard. He also included topics about the location and benefit of the covenant and the effects of the *al-Alast* address on worldly life, as well as the types of spiritual and mystical interpretations in understanding the verse from the perspective of Muslim mystics and Sufis (Soltani, ٩١-١٢٧).

Radan, Diyari, and Mofatteh, after examining and critiquing various viewpoints, though incompletely and without considering the background of the discussion, concluded that the intent of the covenant is the ongoing human testimony to God's Lordship throughout their life, which should not be hindered by veils or sins (Radan, Diyari, and Mofatteh, ١٢٨-١٥٣).

Momtahn, Soltani, and Khosravani examined the covenant of *al-Alast* from the perspective of the Quran and narrations from the Infallible Imams, which is mostly narrative in nature and defends the Shi'a discourse, without any reference to the background of their discussion (Momtahn, Soltani, and Khosravani, ٦٧-٨٨).

Mir Bagheri also tried to examine the "The World of *Dharr*" in the Quran using ١٤ verses. In one case, he mentioned Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A'raf* and, with the help of narrations and without addressing and critiquing exegetical views, brought up points in support of the existence of such a world before this one (Mir Bagheri, ١٢٣-١٤٢).

None of the research conducted on this holy verse has focused on a "Conceptual/Exegetical flow analysis." What distinguishes the present study from

these others is its historical-intellectual approach using the method of "Concept Analysis." Through this, the intellectual efforts of hadith scholars, exegetes, and Muslim Quranic scholars on the holy verse throughout different periods are analyzed as various exegetical concepts in a "diachronic" manner, and the reasons for the widespread acceptance and longevity of these concepts are explained in light of an exegetical flow analysis.

٢. Research Methodology

This study employs a historical-exegetical methodology and uses a "Concept Analysis" approach to examine the following points:

- It gathers exegetical viewpoints related to the "The World of *Dharr*" from hadith and exegetical sources from different historical periods to analyze the social and historical factors that influenced their formation.
- It examines the historical evolution of the concept of the "The World of *Dharr*" through hadith texts, exegetical views, and theological discussions.
- The information collected from various sources is evaluated against Quranic themes and meanings, and a new understanding and interpretation of the verse is provided using a thematic research and contemplative approach.

٣. Research Concepts

The main concepts of this study are:

٣,١. Concept

The study of "Concept," which is somewhat equivalent to "Conception" or "Mental image of a subject," has gained a special place in contemporary studies and has

attracted the attention of scholars in all scientific fields. This particular attention is due to the fact that researchers have found that in every field, the final opinion and view of a scholar are entirely dependent on their concept or perception of the principles and foundations. In this regard, the analysis of exegetical concepts, whether general or specific, as intended in this article, is considered part of the exegetical flow analysis.

When the discussion of "Concept Analysis" comes up, the researcher is compelled to adopt a historical approach to the research and must seek to explain the transformations that an idea or concept has undergone throughout its life. Therefore, "Concept Analysis" is a type of historical-intellectual research that has found its way into intellectual and research circles in the contemporary era and can be studied under the heading of "Exegetical Flowology." Accordingly, it is of great importance to discover and explain the various exegetical concepts that have emerged throughout history, and to analyze the reasons for their longevity and widespread acceptance or the factors for their stagnation and abandonment in different historical periods.

The meaning of a "Concept" is the perception that individuals have of a specific subject, in such a way that their perception is named with a specific term or word. And the meaning of a "History of concepts" is paying attention to concepts and terms from their historical perspective within a continuum, as well as the understanding that audiences had within a specific time and place, and based on that understanding, gave that subject an identity (Gerami, ۲۰۱۶ AD/۱۳۹۶ SH: ۱۰۶).

Accordingly, a concept has two important characteristics. First, it is social, and it has completely moved out of the individual realm. Second, it is the result of a process that has historicity (Pakatchi, ۲۰۱۷ AD/۱۳۹۶ SH: ۷).

Accordingly, it should be noted that the purpose of a "Concept" is not a philosophical-aesthetic reading that can be defined and examined as a "Mental image with an effect." (Qaramaleki and Nasekhiyan, ۲۰۱۵ AD/۱۳۹۵ SH: ۳۴)

In a study with a "History of Concepts" approach, every concept and term is studied from the perspective of its formation, its transformation over time, and its establishment or disappearance, and the reasons for these events are examined. Although research into the "History of Concepts" has its roots in Western philosophical studies, its generalization to other intellectual fields shows that it can also be used as a basis for exegetical studies. Accordingly, discovering and explaining the various exegetical concepts that have appeared throughout history, and analyzing the reasons for their permanence and widespread acceptance or the factors that led to their decline and abandonment in different periods, is of great importance. The present study attempts to pay attention to these important points in the course of studying the concepts in the interpretation of Verse ۱۷۲ of Surah *al-A'raf*.

۳,۲. The "The World of *Dharr*"

The "The World of *Dharr*" means the world of particles or the population of human beings who, before the physical creation of Adam, were created as "His Progeny" in the presence of God, and a covenant of acknowledgment of God's Lordship was taken from them. There, according to Verse ۱۷۲ of *al-A'raf*, God asked all of Adam's progeny: "Am I not your Lord?" And they all said: "Yes, we have testified." Therefore, from the perspective of Muslims, the "The World of *Dharr*" is when God, after creating Adam, brought out all the men and women who would be born from his loins—from the first Adam until the end of the world—and gathered them all at once in the form of particles, and then said to them: "Am I not

your Lord?" They said: "Yes, You are our Lord." After this confession, God returned them to Adam's loins (cf. Mughnīyah, ٢٠٠٣ AD/١٤٢٤ AH: ٣, ٤١٨).

٤. Hadith Scholars of Both Schools (Sunni and Shi'a) and the First Attempts at Interpreting the Verse

The narrative nature of the Islamic heritage in the first centuries AH requires us to look at hadith collections to access the efforts made in interpreting Verse ١٢٢ of Surah *al-A'raf* during this period. *Mālik ibn Anas* (d. ١٧٩ AH), a prominent Sunni hadith scholar in the second century AH, for the first time revealed a narration that later played an important role in shaping Islamic intellectual currents. With his chain of transmission, he narrated from *Muslim ibn Yasār al-Juhanī* that when he was asked about the verse: "And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify against themselves, [saying], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] was so you would not say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware," he said, quoting *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb*: "Indeed, God, the Blessed and Exalted, created Adam. Then He wiped his back with His right hand and brought forth a progeny from it. He said: "I have created these for Paradise, and they will act with the deeds of the people of Paradise." Then He wiped his back again and brought forth another progeny from it. He said: "I have created these for Hell, and they will act with the deeds of the people of Hell." (*Mālik ibn Anas*, ١٩٩١ AD/١٤١٢ AH: ٢, ٦٩)

All hadith scholars who have narrated this tradition trace their chain of transmission back to *Mālik ibn Anas*. In the period of the third century AH, this narration with the same chain of transmission can be traced in at least ١٠ Sunni hadith sources (cf. Ibn Wahab Miṣrī, ١٩٨٥ AD/١٤٠٦ AH: ٨١; Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr, ١٩٩٦ AD/١٤١٧ AH: ٥, ١٦٢; Ibn Abī Shaybah, ١٩٨٨ AD/١٤٠٩ AH: ٣, ٥١٠; Ibn

Ḥanbal, ١٩٩٥ AD/١٤١٦ AH: ١, ٢٩٨; Abū Dāwūd, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٤٣٠ AH: ٧, ٩١; Tirmidhī, ١٩٩٦: ٥, ١٥٨; Ibn Abī Āṣim, ١٩٧٩ AD/١٤٠٠ AH: ١, ٧٣; Nasā'ī, ١٩٩١ AD/١٤١٢ AH: ١٠, ١٠٢).

The widespread narration of this report and its connection to Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A'rāf* paved the way for the formation of a concept that was later named the "*The world of Dharr*" Apart from the absolute singularity and strangeness of the chain of transmission of this narration in the first three classes, which continues until the time of *Mālik ibn Anas*, the judgment of Sunni hadith critics about this narration also indicates its disjunction in the chain. According to *Aḥmad Muhammad Shākir*, a contemporary Sunni hadith scholar, *Muslim ibn Yasār al-Juhanī*, who claimed to have heard the narration from *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb*, never had such an opportunity due to the time gap, and a narrator in this period has been omitted from the chain (Ibn Ḥanbal, ١٩٩٥ AD/١٤١٦ AH: ١, ٢٩٨). *Abū Dāwūd*, after reporting the known chain, refers to another chain in which *Muslim ibn Yasār* narrates the report from *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* through the intermediacy of *Naʿīm ibn Rabīʿa*. But *Abū Dāwūd* immediately notes that "And the hadith of Malik is more complete." (Abū Dāwūd, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٤٣٠ AH: ٧, ٩١)

This correction by *Abū Dāwūd*, however, could not remove the narration from its singularity and disjunction. Because *Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt*, another contemporary Sunni hadith scholar, judges the chain of transmission as follows: "This chain is weak... and *Naʿīm ibn Rabīʿa* is unknown, for only *Muslim ibn Yasār* narrated from him." (Abū Dāwūd, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٤٣٠ AH: ٧, ٩١; Explained by *Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt*) *Shākir* also believes that *Mālik ibn Anas* deliberately omitted the name of *Naʿīm ibn Rabīʿa* from the chain of transmission due to the unknown nature of his condition (Ibn Ḥanbal, ١٩٩٥ AD/١٤١٦ AH: ١, ٢٩٨). The fact that a narrator asked *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* about the interpretation of a verse of the Quran is also

inconsistent with reliable reports that indicate the second Caliph's anti-exegetical approach.

In any case, this weak narration became a foundational text in the structure of Islamic thought. It seems that a powerful determinist current was the promoter of such a narration, which links the fate of human beings to the "The World of *Dharr*" before their creation. Numerous other narrations with the same approach have been transmitted mainly from Ibn Abbas, finding their way into narrative sources, both exegetical and hadith-based (For nearly fifteen narrations from Ibn Abbas, cf. Ṭabarī, ١٣, ٢٢٢).

However, in the Shi'a hadith heritage, reports related to the "The World of *Dharr*" are also available with a high frequency. This abundance of reports has led some contemporary researchers to propose the hypothesis of the "Spiritual *Tawātur*" (recurrent transmission) of these narrations (cf. Azarakhsh, Izadi and Shababi: ١١٩-١٤٢). The diversity and variety of these reports, according to what has been counted in the mentioned research, reaches twenty cases. The majority of written Shi'a works in the first three centuries AH refer to different versions of these narrations, which have been examined in previous research.

Shi'a hadith currents have long had different views on these narrations. While narrators such as *Zurārah ibn A'yan* and his related circle accepted the literal meaning of these narrations and widely narrated them, the Shi'a current established in Baghdad, such as *Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam* and his companions, apparently did not report any such narrations (Regarding the conflict between these two trends, cf. Gerami, ٢٠١٧ AD/١٣٩٦ SH: ١١٨).

‘Ayyāshī, among the ١٣ narrations he brought under the verse, reported ٤ from *Zurārah* (‘Ayyāshī, ١٩٦٠ AD/١٣٦٠ AH: ٢, ٣٧). *Barqī* (d. ٢٧٤ AH) reported three out of four narrations (Barqī, ١٩٥١ AD/١٣٧١ AH: ١, ٢٤١). Kulaynī (d. ٣٢٩ AH) reported two narrations from *Zurārah* and two from *Bukayr ibn A'yun* and

‘Abdullāh ibn Bukayr, who were affiliated with *Zurārah* (Kulaynī, ١٩٨٦ AD/١٤٠٧ AH: ٢, ٧) And *Shaykh Ṣadūq* (d. ٣٨١ AH) reported one out of three narrations from *Zurārah* and one from *Bukayr ibn A‘yun* (Ṣadūq, ١٩٦٥ AD/١٣٨٥ AH: ١, ١١٨).

Of course, the theological approach governing the Shi'a current of Baghdad up to the time of *Shaykh Muḥīd* and *Sayyid Murtaḍā* did not tolerate a literal understanding of these narrations and seriously criticized the concept of the "The World of *Dharr*." (cf. Muḥīd, ١٩٩٢ AD/١٤١٣ AH: ٤٧; *ibid.*, ١١٣; Sayyid Murtaḍā, ١٩٩٨: ١, ٢٩)

٥. Views of the Exegetes

With the formation of the first independent exegetical collections, and given the narrative approach of this exegesis, we do not see much change in the view of the "The World of *Dharr*" concept. These exegetes are, in fact, the continuators of the path of the previous hadith scholars.

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. ١٥٠ AH), an exegete of the second century AH, as was his interpretive habit, narrated the same view of the hadith scholars under Verse ١٧٢ of Surah *al-A‘rāf*, without attributing it to anyone, as follows: "God Almighty wiped the right side of Adam's back and brought out from it white particles like moving ants, and then wiped the left side of Adam's back and brought out from it black particles like ants. These particles formed a thousand nations. Then God Almighty said to Adam (AS): "These are your progeny from whom we have taken a covenant that they will worship Me and not associate any partners with Me..." (Balkhī, ٢٠٠٢ AD/١٤٢٣ AH: ٢, ٧٣)

Yahyā ibn Sallām, another exegete of the second century AH, for the first time links the concept of this verse with the issue of determinism and says: "After God Almighty took the covenant from Adam's progeny, He returned them to his loins,

and according to what was predestined here, the human's fate of wretchedness or happiness was sealed from the time they were in their mothers' wombs. Those on whose scroll of life the pen of wretchedness has been written will live in a way that, by associating partners with God Almighty, they will violate the eternal covenant and promise." (Yaḥyā ibn Sallām, ٢٠٠٤ AD/١٤٢٥ AH: ٢, ٦٥٥)

In the early years of the third century AH, the famous hadith scholar and exegete of the Quran, 'Abdul Razzaq Ṣan'ānī (d. ٢١١ AH), by relying on a narration from Ibn 'Abbās, provides a summarized version of the same previous view of the holy verse (Ṣan'ānī, ١٩٩٨ AD/١٤١٩ AH: ٩٨).

However, in the final years of this century, the mystically-oriented exegete of the Quran, Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh Tustarī (d. ٢٨٣ AH), contrary to the prevailing view, believed that the addressees of the covenant were specifically the prophets of God, not all of Adam's progeny, as emphasized in the verse: "And [mention] when We took from the prophets their covenant—and from you..." (al-Aḥzāb: ٧) (Tustarī, ٢٠٠٢ AD/١٤٢٣ AH: ١, ٦٨)

With the entry into the fourth century AH and the presence of Ṭabarī (d. ٣١٠ AH) in the field of exegesis, we see an expansion and diversity of narrations, each of which tries in some way to interpret Verse ١٧٢. Ṭabarī, who from the beginning based his exegetical approach on the prevailing concept of the "The World of Dharr," dedicates eight pages of his commentary to this topic, mentioning narrations, most of which (nearly ١٥ narrations) are attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, and some are reported from 'Umar (٣ narrations) and 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn 'Āṣ (٣ narrations) (Ṭabarī: ١٣, ٢٢٢).

Gradually, with the entry of theological ideas into the field of exegesis, critiques were leveled against this concept. The first to criticize this concept were the Mu'tazili theologians, followed by the Shi'a theologians. The critique of the "The World of Dharr" concept, which began in the late fourth century AH, was pursued

with clarity in theological and exegetical circles in the fifth century AH. *Shaykh Mufīd* (d. ٤١٣ AH), a prominent Shi'a theologian, by referring to Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A'raf*, considers the literal interpretation of the verse to be the practice of the followers of transmigration, the *Hashwīyya* (a group of Sunni traditionalists), and the general Sunni public. He interprets the verse metaphorically and believes that it should not be taken literally, but rather its meaning is that God Almighty took a covenant and a promise from all the children of Adam throughout history by perfecting their intellectual faculty and guiding them to the signs of His creation (Mufīd, *ibid*: ٤٧ and ١١٣; Sayyid Murtaḍā, ١٩٩٨: ١, ٢٩).

At the same time, the Mu'tazili *Qāḍī 'Abdul Jabbār* (d. ٤١٥ AH) opposed the view that God took a confession from Adam and his progeny in the "*The world of Dharr*" and made them testify against themselves in that world, considering such an interpretation to be wrong and impossible (cf. Qāḍī 'Abdul Jabbār, ٢٠٠٥ AD/١٤٢٦ AH: ١٥٣).

Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. ٤٣٦ AH) also considered the acceptance of that view a sign of lack of insight and ignorance, and contrary to reason and the literal meaning (cf. Sayyid Murtaḍā, ١٩٩٢ AD/١٤١٣ AH: ٢, ٣٧٦).

The critique of the "*The World of Dharr*" concept in theological circles also found its way into exegetical circles and sources. *Zamakhsharī* (d. ٥٣٨ AH), a Mu'tazili-leaning Sunni exegete, emphasized the allegorical and imaginative nature of the verse's content and interpreted the divine covenant taken from the children of Adam as the establishment of evidence of Lordship and oneness (Zamakhsharī, ١٩٨٦ AD/١٤٠٧ AH: ٢, ١٦٦).

Ṭabrisī (d. ٥٤٨ AH), *Ibn Shahr Āshūb* (d. ٥٨٨ AH), and *Ibn 'Aṭīyya* also considered that view contrary to the apparent meaning of the verse (cf. Ṭabrisī, ١٩٥٢ AD/١٣٧٢ AH: ٤, ٧٦٥-٧٦٦; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, ١٩٩٠ AD/١٣٦٩ SH: ٣٠٣; Ibn 'Aṭīyya, ٢٠٠١ AD/١٤٢٢ AH: ٢, ٤٧٤). Sadiqi Tehrani (d. ١٤٣٢ AH) also

considered the verse's indication of the "*The world of Dharr*" to be incomprehensible and in contradiction with the verse's literal meaning (cf. Sadiqi Tehrani, ۱۹۸۵ AD/۱۴۰۶ AH: ۱۲, ۲۸). Muhammad Hadi Ma'rifat (d. ۱۴۲۷ AH) considered that view contrary to the apparent meaning of the holy verse, to the extent that he said the verse does not refer to it at all (cf. Ma'rifat, ۲۰۰۲ AD/۱۴۲۳ AH: ۴۳۸-۴۳۹).

Despite this, exegetes such as *Fakhr Rāzī* (d. ۶۰۶ AH) and Allama *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* (d. ۱۴۰۲ AH) tried, by criticizing the view of those who supported the verse's indication of the divine confession from the children of Adam in this world, to relate the event of the covenant taken from Adam and his children to the "*The world of Dharr*." (cf. *Fakhr Rāzī*, ۱۹۹۹ AD/۱۴۲۰ AH: ۱۵, ۳۹۸-۴۰۲; *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, ۲۰۱۰ AD/۱۳۹۰ SH: ۸, ۳۱۱-۳۲۳)

In this regard, a group of exegetes such as *Rashīd Riḍā*, *Marāghī*, *Ibn 'Āshūr*, *Mughnīyah*, *Sayyid Quṭb*, *Qāsimī*, *Abū Zuhra*, and *Faḍlullāh*, with strong criticism of attributing this covenant to the "*The World of Dharr*" and a world of which no human has any memory, consider the covenant in the verse to refer to the "*Innate Covenant*" of God with all human beings, which God took from all the children of humanity from the very beginning of creation. This covenant is within the human being and their inner consciousness, and with the help of their inner abilities such as intellect, knowledge, and reflection on God's signs, both within themselves and in the natural world, they can perceive and witness it (cf. *Rashīd Riḍā*, ۱۹۹۰: ۹, ۳۲۶; *Marāghī*: ۹, ۱۰۳; *Ibn 'Āshūr*, ۱۹۹۹ AD/۱۴۲۰ AH: ۸, ۳۴۶; *Mughnīyah*, ۲۰۰۳ AD/۱۴۲۴ AH: ۳, ۴۱۸-۴۱۹; *Sayyid Quṭb*, ۲۰۰۴ AD/۱۴۲۵ AH: ۳, ۱۳۹۲; *Qāsimī*, ۱۹۹۷ AD/۱۴۱۸ AH: ۵, ۲۱۶-۲۱۷; *Abū Zuhra*: ۶, ۳۰۰۴; *Faḍlullāh*, ۱۹۹۸ AD/۱۴۱۹ AH: ۱۰, ۲).

٦. Critique of Exegetical Views and Presentation of a New Interpretation of the Verse

Among the various views of exegetes regarding Verse ١٧٢ of Surah *al-A'raf*: "And (remember) when your Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed (or from Adam's loins his offspring) and made them testify as to themselves (saying): "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yes! We testify," lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: "Verily, we have been unaware of this." we witness a significant diversity in how this verse is understood and interpreted." This diversity not only indicates the conceptual complexity of the verse but is also a sign of the influence of the intellectual foundations, belief systems, and methodology of each exegete in interpreting the Quran.

Among these views, two main approaches are evident:

١. The "The World of Dharr" approach, which considers the covenant to have been taken in a world before the material world and at a stage of human existence known as the "The World of Dharr."
٢. The rational and innate interpretation, which considers the mentioned covenant to be not in a trans-material world, but in the essence of the human being, and in an innate and rational manner.

Despite their fundamental differences, both of these views attempt to explain a common concept: human responsibility before God and the proof of divine authority on the Day of Judgment. However, the interpretive methods and logical consequences of these views are different from the Quranic text and need to be systematically and argumentatively critiqued and compared.

٦,١. Critique of the "The World of *Dharr*" View

The "The World of *Dharr*" approach, although it has beauty and intellectual depth from the perspective of Islamic mysticism and metaphysics, faces serious challenges at the level of Quranic exegesis and common sense. The first and most prominent of these challenges is the lack of human memory of this covenant. If such a covenant was really taken in the "The World of *Dharr*," why are humans generally unaware of it? Can it be expected that such a great event would not remain in the individual or collective memory of humanity? In response to this question, some exegetes of the "The World of *Dharr*" have provided explanations that are more of a relative justification than a decisive argument, and they often attribute the sin to the human and the resulting forgetfulness to attachment to the worldly life. This type of answer, although it can be accepted from a mystical point of view, does not have sufficient strength from a scientific and rational perspective. Another challenge is the absence of any explicit evidence in the Quran to support the "The World of *Dharr*." Although some exegetes have cited verses such as: "When you took your covenant that you would not say, "Our fathers associated others with Allah before, and we were their descendants after them," these verses by themselves do not have a definitive indication of the existence of the "The World of *Dharr*" and can also be interpreted within a natural and innate framework.

Finally, accepting the "The World of *Dharr*" requires belief in other trans-material worlds, including the *Barzakh* (intermediate realm), the *world of archetypes* (The World of *al-Mithāl*), the World of *intellects* (The World of *al-ʿAql*), and so on. Although these views have a place in Islamic mystical and philosophical texts, they require more defenses at the scientific and exegetical level of the Quran.

٦,٢. Strengthening the Innate and Rational Viewpoint

In contrast, the view that attributes the covenant to human nature (*Fiṭrat*) and their inherent potential has greater argumentative strength. This approach, considering the human intellectual capacity and their ability to know God through signs and natural evidence, offers an interpretation more consistent with reason and human experience. Within this framework, the "*Alast*" verse is not a sign of a trans-material event in the past, but rather a sign of the inherent presence of God's proof within the human being. This proof is always present through human intellect, conscience, and innate disposition and every individual can realize this innate covenant by reflecting on themselves and the world around them. This interpretation is compatible with reason, human experience, and Quranic principles. Furthermore, this view offers practical applicability in human life. That is, the purpose of this verse is not to recall a trans-material covenant, but to recall an internal truth that can be discovered and remembered at any time and in any place.

٧. Understanding the Verse in Light of Thematic Contemplation

In the previous section, we discussed the interpretation of Verse ١٧٢ of Surah *al-A'raf* from the perspective of an immediate, surface-level understanding. In this section, we will examine the verse from the perspective of a contemplative understanding, which is an analytical and inferential approach based on the Quran's semantic network, aiming to expand the text and discover deeper, hidden dimensions of meaning.

٧,١. Immediate and Contemplative Understanding in the Quran

Semantic connection with the Quranic text is possible in two ways:

An immediate understanding that conveys the primary and literal meaning of the verse, and a contemplative understanding that is a secondary, analytical meaning,

seeking to add interpretive value to the text by using the Quran's semantic network and the relationship between verses (Pakatchi, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٣٨٨ SH: ١, ٦٨٣).

Some exegetes call these the "Contextual Understanding" and the "Antecedent Understanding," (Javadi Amoli, ٢٠٠٩ AD/١٣٨٨ SH: ٥, ٥٢٣) which indicates two levels of text comprehension: one superficial and procedural, and the other deep and analytical. In this regard, contemplative understanding requires going beyond the literal boundaries of the text and even connecting with verses that are not necessarily directly related to the verse in question linguistically or contextually, but can help solve interpretive problems.

By re-examining the content of the verse, one can propose an interpretation that the Children of Adam mentioned are the children of Adam in the material world, not beings in the "The World of *Dharr*." This interpretation is justifiable by citing the words and expressions of the verse itself, including "Children of Adam," "Their Loins," and "Their Descendants."

In contrast, the view that considers this covenant to be in a trans-material world faces challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of human memory of this covenant. If such a covenant was truly taken in the "The World of *Dharr*," how is it that humans are generally unaware of it? This issue, despite the justifications provided by some exegetes (such as the influence of the world and human heedlessness), does not have sufficient strength from a scientific and logical point of view. Also, the lack of definitive evidence in the Quran to prove the "The World of *Dharr*" is another weakness of this view. Of course, there are examples of God's conversation with His servants in the Quran, but these conversations require interpretation within a rational and innate framework.

In contrast, the approach that views the covenant within the framework of human nature and their inherent potential has greater argumentative strength. This view is consistent with human intellectual capacity and their ability to know God through

signs and natural evidence. In this framework, the "*Alast*" verse is not a sign of a trans-material event in the past, but rather a sign of the inherent presence of God's proof within the human being. This proof is always present through human intellect, conscience, and innate disposition and every individual can realize this innate covenant by reflecting on themselves and the world around them.

٧,٢. Citing the Quran's Semantic Network

To support this view, one can also use the Quran's semantic network. Verse ١٧٢ of *al-A'raf* is related to other verses in the Quran, such as the following:

- Verse ٢٦ of *al-A'raf* also uses the expression "Children of Adam": "O! Children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you garments to cover your private parts and as adornment. But the garment of righteousness—that is best. This is from the signs of Allah that they may remember."
- Verse ٢٧ of *al-A'raf* states: "O! Children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from the Garden, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he and his tribe see you from where you do not see them. Indeed, We have made the devils allies of those who do not believe."
- Verse ٣١ of *al-A'raf* states: "O! Children of Adam, take your adornment at every place of prostration, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess."
- Verse ٣٥ of *al-A'raf* also states: "O! Children of Adam, if messengers come to you from among you, relating to you My signs—then whoever is conscious of God and does righteousness—there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve."

Beyond that, in Verse ٦٠ of *Yāsīn*, God Almighty speaks of a covenant He made with the Children of Adam: "Did I not enjoin upon you, O Children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan—indeed, he is to you a clear enemy—." In numerous verses of the Holy Quran, the taking of a covenant with the Children of Israel is mentioned (e.g., al-Baqarah/٦٣-٨٣-٨٤-٩٣), or the covenant with the prophets (AS) is specifically referred to (Āli ‘Imrān: ٨١, al-Aḥzāb: ٧). These verses all refer to a covenant that God made with humanity, and they present this covenant not in an unseen world, but in the context of human existence and within the framework of their moral responsibility. Moreover, the use of the past tense at the beginning of the verse ("*Idh Akhadha Rabbuka*") requires precise interpretation. This tense does not necessarily refer to a trans-material event, but can refer to a time in human history when God took testimony from them through their innate nature and intellect.

٧,٣. Critiquing the Allegorical View and Strengthening the Innate Viewpoint

Some exegetes, such as *Zamakhsharī* and *Fayḍ Kāshānī*, believe that this confession and testimony are allegorical and imaginative. That is, the covenant and promise are embedded within human beings, and they have confessed to God's Lordship with the language of reason and the testimony of the heart. However, this view also faces the question: ‘How can the completion of proof be established within this framework?’

In response, it can be said that human intellect and nature are the internal divine proof that can be discovered and remembered at any time and in any place. This proof is always active and accessible through reflection on God's signs and evidence. Ultimately, given the exegetical, rational, and practical framework of the

verse, the approach that views the covenant within the framework of human nature and intellect has greater argumentative strength. This view is not only consistent with the logic of reason but also provides the possibility of practical use of the verse's content in human life. In contrast, the "The world of *Dharr*" view, despite its mystical beauties, requires more defenses at the scientific and exegetical level. In this regard, thematic and contemplative reflection on the Quran can help solve the interpretive challenges of the verse.

The interpretation of this verse is not just a scientific issue but an opportunity to recall an internal truth within every human being that can be a guide for an ethical and spiritual life. Given that Adam and his children exist in the material and natural world, it is necessary for them to remove the veils of heedlessness and rebellious souls and, through intellectual flourishing, purification of the heart, and refinement of the self, discover their inner content. Within every human being, there is an innate and divine point that contains the divine trust and the initial confession of God's Lordship. If a human can discover this internal truth through reflection, contemplation, and self-refinement, and consciously and deliberately testify to God's divinity and Lordship again and again, this is not only in accordance with their nature but also fulfills divine promises and the structure of human existence.

In the Quran, God has placed evidence and signs in the natural world and within human beings so that humans can, through reflection and reasoning, realize His oneness and Lordship. This is not only a prelude to confession in this world, but on the Day of Judgment, no one will be able to say: "We were of this unaware" or "Our fathers associated partners with God, and we were forced to." (Abū Ḥayyān: ٥, ٢١٨-٢١٩)

This interpretation removes the verse from the framework of trans-material time and place and places it within the realm of human nature and individual

responsibility. God's covenant with humanity is, in reality, the innate inclination and inherent potential of human beings to know and confess to God, which exists potentially in all human beings. Every individual, by using their intellect, will, and moral action, is able to turn this potential into awareness and conscious confession. The phrase "*An Taqūlū Yawm al-Qīyāmati innā Kunnā ‘an Hādhā Ghafilīn*" ("lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware") and the next verse "*Aw Taqūlū innamā Ashraka Ābā'unā min Qablu wa Kunnā Dhurrīyyatan min Ba'dihim*" ("Or lest you should say, 'Our fathers associated others with Allah before, and we were their descendants after them") actually highlight the main reason for taking the covenant: that no one can evade their responsibility on the Day of Judgment. God will question every individual based on their innate and intellectual capacities, and He will not count any sin against them except what the individual themselves chose.

٧, ٤. Quranic Evidence Indicating an Internal and Innate Covenant

To support this view, one can point to various categories of Quranic verses, all of which show that God had a covenant with all of His servants that is related to human nature:

- Verses that come with the phrase "They call upon God, dedicating their religion sincerely to Him," which point to the inherent human desire for God.
- Verses that with the phrases "That they may remember" and "only the people of understanding will remember," highlight the importance of reflecting on God's signs and evidence.

- Verses like "Then is he who was a believer like he who was a defiantly disobedient? They are not equal," (al-Sajdah: ١٨) which show that responsibility is individual and conscious.
- Verses that come with phrases like "A reminder for those of understanding," highlighting the importance of wisdom and intellect in knowing the truth.
- Verses like "So on that Day, their excuses will not benefit those who wronged, nor will they be asked to appease" (al-Rūm: ٥٧), which show that on the Day of Judgment, no excuse will be accepted.
- The verse "Did I not enjoin upon you, O Children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan?" (Yāsīn: ٢٦), which refers to an internal and innate covenant.
- Verses like "And He made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little is it that you give thanks," which highlight the importance of these blessings in knowing God.
- Verses like "So that people would not have a case against you," which highlight that God's proof has been perfected for everyone.
- Verses like "How can there be a covenant for the polytheists with Allah and with His Messenger?" (al-Tawbah: ٧) which show that the covenant with God is related to faith and sincerity.
- The verse "And We had already taken a covenant from Adam before, but he forgot, and We did not find in him determination," (Ṭāhā: ١١٥) which shows that the covenant with humans requires effort and determination.

The Holy Quran, in terms of its content, has clear indications that God had a covenant with all of His servants, but this covenant is not in the "The world of Dharr" or an unseen world, but is hidden in human nature and within them. This

view is compatible with the optional and rational nature of human beings and makes their responsibility for this covenant individual and conscious. Furthermore, the Quran does not explicitly mention the existence of the "The World of *Dharr*," and all verses that speak of taking a covenant can be interpreted within the framework of human nature and intellect. This type of Quranic discourse is in harmony with human understanding and thought, and instead of inviting the individual to unseen and unknowable worlds; it invites them to themselves and their own nature. Ultimately, the existential experience of human beings also shows that we all have had moments of witnessing the existence of God, whether in dark solitude or in moments of silence and contemplation. These experiences are a sign of that internal covenant that is always seeking to be discovered and renewed.

Conclusion

From what has been said, the following results were obtained:

- The first exegetical views on the verse in question were influenced by hadith discourse and interpretive narrations, and the concept of the "The World of *Dharr*" entered the exegetical discourse from narrations.
- The majority of the narrations that reported the "The World of *Dharr*" concept are among the narrations attributed to the Companions (*Mauqūf*), and the only narration that attempts to raise itself to the level of a *Marfū'* hadith has absolute singularity and strangeness in its chain of transmission in the first three classes and up to the time of *Mālik ibn Anas*.
- The first critiques of the concept based on the "The world of *Dharr*" narrations and a literal interpretation of the verse began in the late fourth

century AH by Shi'a and Mu'tazili theologians and was continued by exegetes from the fifth and sixth centuries AH.

- The Holy Quran refers to various examples of God's covenant with the Children of Adam, the prophets (AS), and the Children of Israel, and therefore the holy verse is not separate from these verses.
- By using a thematic study of the Quran and examining the indication of the verse in question with other verses of the Quran, it becomes clear that God has taken a covenant and a promise from all human beings and has placed its signs within human beings and the natural world. This is so that human beings, through their intellectual capacity, free will, and voluntary actions, seek to perceive and witness those signs and always remember their innate covenant with God. They should seek help from these signs on the path of their struggle for existence and their journey of self-perfection and, based on their correct and proper use of the powers and capacities they have, confess to God's Lordship and accept responsibility for all of their actions. This way, they will not be among the heedless, the excuse-makers, and the polytheists. Many verses in the Quran indicate and correspond to the above interpretation; verses in which the covenant of God, the Children of Adam, the remembrance of divine and lordly signs, the remembrance of those with wisdom and knowledge, the completion of God's proof upon people, and so on are mentioned

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