

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

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In the Islamic tradition, Satan was known to be a pious and obedient believer of God. During Iblis). His disobedience is what) إبليس this phase we find in the Qur'an that he is referred to as the devil)<sup>1</sup>, who is known to spread evil and misguide the believers. His) شيطان made him into disobedience began with him rejecting the command of Allah (swt), when He commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam (a). However, Satan refused as he considered himself to be superior in creation, since Adam was made of clay and Satan was made of fire. This article will focus on Surah Al-A'raf, verse 11, considered to be 39th chapter in terms of revelation<sup>2</sup>. The verse states

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

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

,Another verse of the similar content states

فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى أَنْ يَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ

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

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

illa)<sup>3</sup> known as the) الّا Within the Qur'an we find the constant usage of the exceptive particle mustathna) and the) مستثنى which necessitates two nouns, the exception حرف الاستثناء

mustathna minh)4. Consider the following example) مستثنى منه antecedent of the exception  
 The people came to me, except for Zayd. In this sentence, “The people” is the antecedent of  
 the exception “Zayd”, i.e., the noun from which the exception is made. “Except” is the exceptive  
 particle and “Zayd” is the noun which is excepted i.e. the noun succeeding the exceptive  
 particle. To understand the same sentence within Arabic grammar, consider the following

جائني القوم الا زيداً

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

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

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

Zayd5 – زيداً مستثنى ((The excepted exception

Typically the word that comes after the exceptive particle is the exception, in which the  
 excepted has a relationship with the antecedent of the exception6. The relationship between  
 the exception and the antecedent of the exception are divided into 3

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

جائني القوم الا زيداً

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

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

جائني القوم الا حمراً

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

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

جائني القوم الا زيداً

In which the relationship between the excepted and the antecedent of the excepted in سالبة (b

For example

ما جئني القوم الا زيدا

being the particle of negation. ما. The people did not come to me except for Zayd<sup>7</sup>  
In which the antecedent of the excepted is mentioned in the sentence. For example تام (3 a

جئني القوم الا زيدا

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

In which the antecedent of the excepted is not For example مفرغ<sup>8</sup> (b

جئني الا زيد

will no longer مستثنى doer)<sup>9</sup> in this case, since the rules of) فاعل Zayd will be considered the  
apply.

Considering the principles mentioned above, we are able to apply them on the verse concerning  
our topic

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

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

مَلَائِكَةٍ مَسْتَثْنَى مِنْهُ

الْأَ حَرْفُ الِاسْتِثْنَاءِ

إِبْلِيسَ مَسْتَثْنَى

In this verse, we see that "angels" is the antecedent of the excepted, while "but not except" is  
the exceptive particle and "Iblis" is the exception. In terms of the relationship between the  
تام affirmative positive), and) موجبة antecedent of the excepted and the excepted, this verse is  
the antecedent of the excepted in mentioned). However, the difference of opinion is regarding)

the relationship between the antecedent of the excepted, in this case, angels, and whether this would be *متصل* (connected) or *منقطع* (disconnected). If one interprets this relationship to be *متصل*, then one can infer that Iblis is part of the angels and considered to be one as well, on the contrary, if one considers the relationship to be *منقطع*, it would mean that Iblis is not part of the angels, rather, he is a Jinn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

rebelled against God and fell from his elevated status.

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

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

*This is because it is possible that the Qur'an's reference to Iblis as being from the Jinn could" be due to the fact that some of the angels can also be described as Jinn, if not all of them, this is because the root of the word – Jinn – means hidden, and the angels are hidden from our world as we cannot see them!"16.*

Despite the differences in opinions regarding this matter, this discussion vitalizes the importance and application of Arabic grammar within the Islamic sciences, more so in Tafsir and Qur'anic sciences. From this, one is able to understand how each and every word within Arabic grammar has the potential to affect the entire meaning of a sentence and in this particular discussion, a whole concept

## Notes

1. Root letters شطن, A synonym which means to be alienated or to go into different directions. al- Isfahani, Raghib Mufradat alfaadh al-Qur'an. p. 404. تباعد for

2. Ma'rifat, Muhammad Hadi Tamhid fi Uloom al Qur'an . v.1 p. 128

3. Other exceptive particles include غير, سوى, حاش, عدا, خلا

4. This discussion appears in the books of Arabic Grammar under the section of the accusative case – منصوب

5. There is a difference of opinion on what the governor (عامل) is i.e. مستثنى for the vowel of what makes it the accusative case. Refer to al-Anbari, al-Insaf fi mas'ail al-khilaf bayn al-Nahwiyeen; al- Basriyeen wa al- Kufiyeen p. 212.

6. In the case where it is obligatory for the مستثنى to be the accusative case, the مستثنى can precede the مستثنى منه.

7. In this case (with the condition of the sentence being تام) there is a difference of opinion; if the مستثنى is منقطع, the Ahl al-Hijaz only allowed the مستثنى to be منصوب while the Bani

its vowel will be according to بدل, If treated as a بدل or منصوب Tamim allowed it to be both its grammatical position in the sentence. Refer to Abdul-Hamid, Muhammad Muhi al-Deen, Sharh Qatr al-Nida, wa bal il- sada. p. 304.

is مستثنى منه will not apply since the الاستثناء muffaragh), the rules of مفرغ 8. In the case of not mentioned. Thus the sentence will be treated according to the grammatical position of each word in the sentence based on word governance. 9.The standard vowel for the فاعل is the nominative case (مرفوع).

10. جنس

11. Ma'rifat, Hadi Tamhid fi Ulum al Qur'an. v.1 p. 129.

12. Tabrasi, Abu Ali Fadhl ibn Hassan Majma ul- Bayan fi Tafsir al- Qur'an. v.4, p.190.

13. Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussayn. Tafsir al-Mizan. v.8 p.29.

14. The verse is as following

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

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

15. Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussayn. Tafsir al-Mizan. v.8 p.30.

16. al-Hakim, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir. Ulum al Qur'an p.471