Akademika 96(3), October 2026
https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2026-9603-07

Metaphysical and Empirical Paradise in the Dialectics of the Contextual Qur'an

Syurga Metafizis dan Emperikal dalam Dialektika al-Quran Kontekstual

HELFI*, AHMAD YUNUS MOHD NOOR, FAJRUL WADI,
SOFIA RIDHA & SHAFRA

Received:22-11-2025 /Accepted: 13-9-2026

ABSTRACT

Descriptions of paradise in the Qur'an are generally understood as a metaphysical eschatological reality through a textual reading of symbols of pleasure. This approach has not yet fully explained the relationship between the language of the Qur'an and the socio-cultural context of Arab society, nor its relevance to non-Arab societies. This study aims to reconstruct the meaning of al-Jannah through a dialectic between the text of the Qur'an, the Arab socio-historical context, and the perspective of contemporary readers. This study is a library-based research project employing a thematic exegetical method. Primary data consists of Qur'anic verses containing the term al-Jannah and its derivatives, whilst secondary data is drawn from exegetical works, linguistic literature, and sociolinguistic studies. Data was collected through documentary analysis and analysed using sociolinguistic and contextual linguistic approaches. The results of the study indicate that the description of paradise in the Qur'an constitutes a revelatory communication strategy that employs symbols familiar to the Arab community to explain metaphysical reality. The universality of the meaning of paradise does not lie in its physical form, but rather in the values of happiness, security, abundance and perfection represented through these symbols. This study offers a contextual interpretative paradigm which affirms that the concept of al-Jannah remains relevant to cross-cultural societies without detracting from its theological dimension.

Keywords: paradise, contextual exegesis, sociolinguistics, eschatology, the dialectic between text and context

ABSTRAK

Deskripsi mengenai syurga dalam al-Quran lazimnya difahami sebagai suatu realiti eskatologi yang bersifat metafizik melalui pembacaan tekstual terhadap simbol-simbol kenikmatan. Pendekatan ini masih belum menjelaskan secara menyeluruh hubungan antara bahasa al-Quran dengan konteks sosiobudaya masyarakat Arab serta kerelevanannya kepada masyarakat bukan Arab. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membina semula makna al-Jannah melalui dialektik antara teks al-Quran, konteks sosiohistoris masyarakat Arab, dan perspektif pembaca kontemporari. Kajian ini merupakan penyelidikan kepustakaan yang menggunakan kaedah tafsir tematik. Data primer terdiri daripada ayat-ayat al-Quran yang mengandungi istilah al-Jannah berserta derivatifnya, manakala data sekunder diperoleh daripada karya-karya tafsir, literatur kebahasaan, dan kajian sosiolinguistik. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen dan dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan sosiolinguistik serta linguistik kontekstual. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa deskripsi syurga dalam al-Quran merupakan strategi komunikasi wahyu yang menggunakan simbol-simbol yang dekat dengan pengalaman masyarakat Arab bagi menjelaskan realiti metafizik. Kesejagatan makna syurga tidak terletak pada bentuk fizikalnya, sebaliknya pada nilai-nilai kebahagiaan, keamanan, kelimpahan, dan kesempurnaan yang diungkapkan melalui simbol-simbol tersebut. Kajian ini menawarkan suatu paradigma pentafsiran kontekstual yang menegaskan bahawa konsep al-Jannah kekal relevan untuk masyarakat merentas budaya tanpa mengurangkan dimensi teologinya.

Katakunci: syurga, tafsir kontekstual, sosiolinguistik, eskatologi, dialektika teks dan konteks

INTRODUCTION

Paradise is one of the central themes in Qur'anic eschatology. As well as being presented as a reward for the faithful, paradise also serves as a theological instrument that shapes humanity's moral, spiritual and ethical orientation. Its existence is affirmed through numerous verses that describe its levels, delights, inhabitants and various characteristics, such as Surah al-Ra'd [13]: 35, Surah Maryam [19]: 60 and 63, and Surah Ali 'Imran [3]: 133 and 136. In Islamic doctrine, belief in Paradise forms part of faith in the unseen matters relating to the Day of Resurrection, the reckoning, the Balance, and Hell. z(Saidin Mansyur, 2018)

Nevertheless, the description of paradise in the Qur'an presents hermeneutical challenges. The Qur'an depicts paradise through symbols familiar to the Arab people, such as lush gardens, flowing rivers, fruits, milk, honey and palaces. These symbols served as an effective means of communicating the revelation to the Arab people living in a desert environment. However, when read by communities with different cultural and ecological backgrounds such as the agrarian communities of Indonesia the question arises as to whether these descriptions should be understood literally or as symbolic language representing an ideal state of bliss within the context of the original recipients of the revelation.

Studies on paradise have developed through various approaches. Classical exegesis generally understands it as a real eschatological reality, whilst contemporary studies utilise linguistic, semantic, hermeneutical and thematic exegetical approaches to uncover the symbolic meaning of the concept of al-Jannah. Deddy Ilyas's research positions paradise as part of faith in the unseen (Deddy Ilyas, 2013), whilst Maalim focuses more on paradise from a linguistic perspective and its indications (Maalim Yunus, 2020). Wildan Taufik examines the linguistic aspects of the concept of paradise (Wildan Taufiq, 2008), whilst Moh. Nailul Muna demonstrates that the visualisation of paradise is closely linked to the historical, cultural and social structures of Arab society. (Moh, 2020).

However, these studies still leave some gaps. Firstly, existing research tends to focus on theological, linguistic or historical aspects in isolation, and thus has not yet linked the metaphysical meaning of paradise with the empirical reality underpinning the symbols of the Qur'an. Secondly, the Arab cultural context is largely understood as a historical backdrop rather than as an interpretative framework for non-Arab societies. Thirdly, there is still a limited number of studies that offer a contextual reading of the concept of al-Jannah whilst maintaining its transcendent dimension and affirming the universality of the Qur'an's message.

In light of this gap, this study offers an interpretation that combines a linguistic analysis of the Qur'an with the socio-historical context of the Arab world as the backdrop to its revelation. The description of paradise is understood as symbolic language that draws on the empirical experiences of Arab society to convey universal values of happiness, security, perfection and pleasure, thereby remaining relevant to cross-cultural societies without losing its theological dimension.

This study aims to redefine the meaning of al-Jannah through linguistic analysis and contextual exegesis. The research questions are as follows: first, how does the use of the term al-Jannah in the Qur'an construct the concept of paradise as a metaphysical reality; Secondly, How the relationship between the empirical description of paradise and its metaphysical essence is understood from the perspective of contextual exegesis; and Third, How the concept of al-Jannah can be reconstructed through contextual exegesis so that it holds universal relevance for non-Arab societies. It is hoped that this research will enrich the development of contextual exegesis of the

Qur'an whilst offering an adaptive model of interpretation for Muslim communities outside the Arab cultural context.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of research type, this interpretative study is a qualitative study within the social sciences, taking the form of library research using a thematic method with a sociolinguistic approach (Muhammad Zubir, 2022). The primary data sources are verses from the Qur'an that discuss paradise, whilst the secondary data sources consist of classical and contemporary exegetical works, linguistic and sociolinguistic literature, and studies on the Arab socio-cultural context.

Data were collected through a documentary study of relevant bibliographic sources and subsequently analysed descriptively and analytically via thematic interpretation, linking linguistic, historical and sociocultural aspects. This interpretative research is also known as interpretative text analysis, as the information obtained is subsequently processed to form a distinct paradigm based on the researcher's perspective. As a form of textual research, the information obtained will yield new conclusions and form formulations that differ from information obtained from other sources, even forming a distinct model of its own. When the verses are linked to the social context in the Arabian Peninsula and in Indonesia, this is connected to a linguistic approach as the basis for God's language of communication when speaking of paradise in a textual sense.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PARADISE FROM A CLASSICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discussions of paradise in classical Islamic scholarship are essentially based on two main sources: the Qur'an and the hadith. Paradise is understood as an eschatological reality provided by Allah as a reward for those who believe and do righteous deeds. Although the Qur'an provides descriptions of gardens, rivers, fruits, food, drink, peace and various other pleasures, the revealed text does not offer an encyclopaedic description of the entirety of Paradise's nature. Thus, the Qur'an's description of Paradise serves more to provide knowledge that is comprehensible to humans regarding the reality of the Hereafter than to offer a fully detailed ontological explanation of the nature of Paradise.

When discussing paradise, Allah informs us that paradise certainly exists, but its quality in the hereafter will be multiplied compared to the paradise in the tangible reality of this world (Wildan Taufiq, 2008). Including the pleasures of paradise experienced by its inhabitants. The pleasures of paradise are experienced with both body and soul, not just spiritually (Moh, 2020). The belief that the pleasures of heaven are experienced both physically and spiritually is put forward by the Jabariyah As'ariyah group, although other groups view the pleasures of heaven as being purely physical-spiritual or spiritual without involving the body (Muhammad Zulfikarullah, 2017).

The group that understands that the pleasures of paradise can only be experienced by the spirit alone by understanding the apparent meaning of verses using ta'wil. Especially when philosophers look at verses that speak of paradise in textual terms. For the Asy'ari group, the use of ta'wil is a secondary method after using the Qur'an and Sunnah. In contrast, for the Mu'tazilah

group, ta'wil of anthropomorphic verses is a primary and obligatory method before using verses and hadiths textually (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

The impasse between the pros and cons, whether the pleasures of heaven are felt by the spirit alone or by both the spirit and the body, led to the conclusion that the human spirit continues to move towards perfection in the form of substantial motion. When the spirit leaves the body, it wants to return to the body as it was before, like a person who wants to return to their hometown. The return of the spirit to the body through a process involving several realms. From the realms of lahut-jabarut-malakut-nasut and back to lahut, each with its own process. The process of refinement from jabarut to lahut requires purification in the form of burning (entering hell) until there are no traces of nasut stains attached to a person. Those who are already free from sin are then worthy of experiencing the pleasures of heaven according to the level of their respective deeds (Muhammad Zulfikarullah, 2017).

Disparities in opinion also arise regarding whether heaven has already been created or not. According to Ahlu Sunnah, heaven and hell were created by Allah before the creation of Prophet Adam as witnessed by the apostle when he was on the Isra' Mi'raj journey (Hanafi, 2017). This view is refuted by the Mu'tazilah and Qadariyah sects, who argue that heaven and hell will be created by Allah after the Day of Judgement, because creating them before the Day of Judgement would leave them uninhabited, and creating heaven and hell before their time is a futile act (Muhammad Zulfikarullah, 2017).

From a classical perspective, there are two positions that must be distinguished. Firstly, heaven as an ontological reality that is, the afterlife, which truly exists and serves as the place of reward for humankind. Secondly, heaven as a reality described through human language that is, a depiction conveyed through concepts already familiar to humankind (Yusuf Ali Tantowi, 2025). The distinction between these two positions is important because linguistic descriptions of heaven must not be equated entirely with the ontological reality of heaven.

This classical perspective provides an important foundation for this research. However, the classical theological approach generally focuses more on ontological and eschatological questions: whether paradise has been created, what its pleasures are like, whether these pleasures are physical or spiritual, and how they endure. Meanwhile, questions regarding why the Qur'an chooses certain vocabulary when describing heaven and how that vocabulary relates to the socio-cultural experiences of Arab society have not yet been the main focus of this debate.

On that basis, the classical view of heaven need not be rejected, but should be expanded. Classical theology provides answers as to what heaven is and what its ontological status is, whilst a sociolinguistic approach can explain how this reality is communicated through language and the social experiences of Arab societies (Bahi, 2020) These two approaches address different issues but are complementary.

Consequently, this study does not question whether paradise actually exists, as its existence forms part of Islamic eschatological doctrine. Rather, this study examines how the Qur'an renders this metaphysical reality comprehensible through empirical language. This question shifts the discussion of al-jannah from the purely theological realm into the linguistic and sociolinguistic realms, without negating its metaphysical dimension. The Qur'an's metaphors serve to link abstract theological concepts with human cognitive structures. (Hasanuddin Chaer, 2025). The physical description of paradise is a revelatory communication strategy, namely the use of the sensory experiences of the Arab people (gardens, rivers, fruits, shade) to explain a metaphysical reality that cannot be understood directly.

A discussion of al-jannah cannot be limited to questions of etymology, frequency of use, or lexical meaning alone. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is always linked to the community that uses, receives and interprets it. Therefore, the use of the word 'jannah' in the Qur'an must be understood within the context of linguistic structure, social experience, geographical environment, and the intellectual horizon of the Arab community as the first recipients of the revelation. Such an approach is not intended to reduce the metaphysical concept of paradise to a worldly reality, but rather to explain how a reality beyond the scope of human experience is communicated through linguistic means that are comprehensible to humans.

Within this framework, Jannah can be understood as a concept with two semantic layers. The first layer is empirical in nature: a enclosed garden teeming with vegetation of various kinds(Husein ibn Muhammad al-Dhamaghani, 1980). The second layer is eschatological-metaphysical in nature, namely the afterlife promised to the faithful. The transition from the first layer to the second takes place through the context of the verse, its collocations, and the accompanying semantic field. Consequently, the term 'jannah', when standing alone in a particular context, may refer to an earthly garden or park, whilst 'jannat ʿadn', 'jannat al-naʿīm', 'jannat al-khuld' and 'jannat al-maʾwā' demonstrate an increasingly clear narrowing of meaning towards an eschatological reality.

Jannah in Arabic, plural form Jinan. Jannah is defined as an eternal garden or paradise in the afterlife reserved for servants of Allah who believe and do righteous deeds. It is a place of unparalleled pleasure, never experienced in this world, and a reward for those who follow Allah's commands and avoid His prohibitions. The word al-jannah in Arabic comes from ja-na-na, which means hidden and closed (M. Shahrur, 2004).

From the word Janna comes the phrase majnun, which means people whose minds are closed. From the word janna, the word al-jinn can also be used, which refers to creatures that are hidden from view and therefore cannot be depicted. The word al-jannah also refers to the existence of paradise in this world and the hereafter, according to the context of the verse. Al-jannah is a land covered with trees with shady branches and so on. Paradise is interpreted from jannah because the essence of paradise is hidden from human reason and senses (Ilyas Daud, 2018). Jannah always has a positive meaning. It is a garden filled with plants located in a field, as described in Surah al-Kahfi verse 32.

This is in line with studies on the distinctive features of the language of the Qur'an, which show that the Qur'an uses vocabulary already familiar to the Arab people to express ideas that were previously unknown within their social sphere. These studies indicate that the distinctive features of the Qur'anic language are not limited to individual words, but also extend to the relationships between words, structure, collocations, and the use of linguistic forms in specific contexts.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates the contextualisation of revelatory communication. Language not only conveys information, but also takes into account the shared knowledge between the communicator and the recipient of the message. In the case of the description of Jannah, experiences of gardens, water, fruit, shade and a secure life form part of the empirical knowledge that enables metaphysical messages to be understood. Thus, the symbols of paradise can be understood as a form of communication that links shared social experience with a reality that cannot yet be experienced directly.

According to Syahrur, the term jannah is generally used to refer to the physical reality of the world. Meanwhile, heaven and hell as places of retribution for the righteous and the unfaithful never existed. Heaven and hell will exist after the destruction of this cosmos; that is, between the first leap (the change of events when the first trumpet is blown) and the second leap (the second trumpet is blown) (Ilyas Daud, 2018). As stated in Surah Ibrahim verse 48, which means: 'That is the day when the earth will be replaced by another earth, and so will the heavens, and they will all gather before the presence of Allah, the One, the Almighty.'

The word jannah is repeated 201 times in various chapters of the Qur'an, using the singular, dual or plural forms. The number of occurrences of the word jannah is equal to the number of occurrences of the word hell (al-nar) in the Qur'an, which is 201 occurrences. In its singular form, the word jannah is repeated 144 times, in its dual form 68 times, in its feminine dual form 7 times, and in its plural form 69 times.(Muhammad Fu'ad Abdul Baqi, n.d.). Al-jannah in its singular form can also be interpreted as a garden on a hillside, as found in Surah al-Baqarah verse 265, or jannah can also be interpreted simply as a garden, as found in Surah al-Syu'ara verse 134, Surah al-An'am verse 141, and Surah al-Kahfi verse 33. Janah can also be interpreted as simply a garden, as in Surah al-Dhukhan verse 26 and Surah Saba' verses 15-16. On this basis, the Arabic word al-jannah can be used to mean one of three things: a garden, a park, or paradise with all its pleasures.

If al-jannah is accompanied by attributes (na'at and ma'ud) such as jannatu adnin, which means the paradise of adnin as mentioned in Surah al-Nahl verse 31, Surah al-Kahfi verse 31, and Surah al-Thaha verse 76. Similarly, the phrase jannatu al-na'im means paradise full of blessings, as found in Surah al-Hajj verse 56, Surah Luqman verse 8, and Surah al-Shafat verse 43. Jannah can also be interpreted as jannatu al-khuldi, which means a place of eternal life as mentioned in Surah al-Furqan verse 15. Jannah in the form of an adjective can also be seen in the expression jannatu al-ma'wa, which means a paradise full of tranquillity, as found in Surah al-Najm verse 15, Surah al-Sajdah verse 19, and Surah al-Nazi'at verse 41. It can also mean paradise in the form of jannatu al-firdaus, as found in Surah al-Mu'min verse 11.

The contextualisation of language does not imply that metaphysical reality is identical to the empirical reality used to explain it. It is here that a clear distinction must be drawn between the 'empirical paradise' as a domain of experience and the 'metaphysical paradise' as an eschatological reality. The empirical paradise is the reality of orchards, gardens, water, fruit, shade and life as experienced by human beings in this world. The metaphysical heaven, on the other hand, is the reality of the afterlife reward that lies beyond the reach of human experience at present. The relationship between the two is representational and communicative in nature, not one of ontological identity.

TABLE 1. The following is a comparison of the phenomenon of paradise in this world and in the hereafter in the discourse of the Qur'an

No	World	Hereafter
1	The existence of activity and relaxation conditions	There is no phenomenon of activity in 'the fruits are close' al-Hakkah; 23 and the fruit is made easy to pick as easy as possible al-Insan; 14 fruits that are abundant, never-ending, and not forbidden to take; al-Waqiah; 32, 33. They do not feel tired within it, and they will never be expelled from it, al-Hijr; 48. He who has placed us in an eternal abode (Paradise) by His grace; within it we do not feel tired nor do we feel weary, al-Fatir; 35.
2	The existence of health and sickness phenomena	There is no sign of illness. Indeed, the hereafter is the true life, al-Angkabut; 64. Al-haya' here refers to the opposite of 'death'.
3	The existence of good and bad phenomena in human activities	The phenomenon of 'crime' was nowhere to be seen, and we removed all feelings of resentment from their hearts. They felt like brothers sitting face to face on the beds that had been provided for them, al-Hijr; 47

4	The existence of conflict and peace phenomena	Surga adalah tempat keselamatan sedangkan neraka adalah tempat kesengsaraan, sesungguhnya yang seperti itu pasti terjadi, yaitu pertengkaran penghuni neraka, Shad; 64 (M. Shahrur, 2004).

Based on Table 1, the characteristics of heaven cannot exist in this world due to the internal contradictory laws that lead to continuous change. In the Qur'an, Al-Jannah is not merely the name of a place in the Hereafter, but a theological concept constructed through empirical symbols familiar to Arab society.

Thus, the sociolinguistic approach offers a corrective to two extreme tendencies in interpreting descriptions of paradise. Firstly, an overly literal approach may assume that all the empirical forms mentioned in the Qur'an are perfectly identical to the physical form of paradise. Secondly, an overly symbolic approach may regard all empirical descriptions as merely metaphorical, thereby negating their eschatological dimension. The sociolinguistic approach lies between the two: empirical forms are recognised as part of the strategy of revelatory communication, whilst metaphysical reality is maintained as an ontological horizon that cannot be reduced to worldly experience.

This framework also explains why contextualising the meaning of paradise does not mean altering the text of the Qur'an to suit local culture. What is contextualised is the way in which the function of symbols is understood, not the replacement of the message of revelation. Non-Arab communities need not imagine paradise exclusively through the lens of the Arab geographical experience. They can understand that rivers, gardens, fruit, shade and various pleasures are communicative devices born of a specific environment, whilst their transcendent value can be translated into the cultural horizons of different experiences.

On this basis, it can be concluded that the empirical paradise is the language of experience, whilst the metaphysical paradise is the horizon of meaning communicated through that experience. The two are not identical, yet neither are they separate. The empirical paradise serves as a medium of understanding, whilst the metaphysical paradise serves as a referential goal. The relationship between the two enables the message of the Qur'an to remain rooted in the context of revelation whilst also possessing a universal reach across space, cultures and societies.

THE PARADISE OCCUPIED BY ADAM IN THE QUR'AN

When referring to the use of jannah for Prophet Adam and Eve, the term jannah in the Qur'an is not followed by any additional words. Therefore, it can be confirmed that jannah, which is interpreted as the paradise inhabited by Adam, is different from the paradise that will be given to believers in the future. Adam's jannah is only a garden or park with everything he needs on this planet because the term is used independently without being associated with other terms after it (Muhammad Zulfikarullah, 2017). The reference to the paradise inhabited by Adam is a paradise that is interpreted as a temporary garden who are on earth (Aktobi Gozali, 2016). This can be understood because the paradise inhabited by Adam was a place where hatred, envy and disobedience still existed. Hatred is illustrated by Satan's attempt to tempt Adam and Eve to approach the forbidden tree, the tree of khuldi, which had been determined by Allah, as can be understood from Surah Thaha verses 120-121.

The argument against Adam's dwelling place in eternal paradise was also raised by Imam al-Thabari, who believed that the paradise inhabited by Adam was still on earth. Al-Thabari's argument was as follows: first, if paradise was an eternal place, how could the rebellious devil enter it, given that paradise was a place free from deceit and sin? Furthermore, in paradise, there

would be no words of deceit or lies, except words of salvation. Eternal paradise is the paradise called dar al-quds (a place that is holy from all sin and error) (Al-Qurthubi, n.d.). The use of the word 'askunu' also indicates temporary residence, not permanent residence (Ibnur Rijal Athi'ullah, 2023)

If Adam and Eve were indeed created in paradise and were already in eternal paradise (jannatul al-huldi), then Adam would certainly not be tempted by eternal life because he already had eternal life in paradise. However, in reality, Adam was still tempted by the devil's seduction, until he ate the fruit of khuldi (Hamka, 1982) This means that eternal life for Adam and his wife was something so special that it needed to be sought and fought for. According to Quraish Shihab, God's warning about Satan as a real enemy is repeated in many places, even as many as 10 times in the Qur'an (Shihab, 2005).

The paradise inhabited by Adam and his wife was not an eternal paradise, but only a garden of abundance located on this earth. The punishment given by Allah to Adam and Eve by sending them down to earth was also experienced by Satan (al-Thabari, 2000). The same interpretation was also expressed by Imam Zamakhsyari, that only Prophet Adam, Eve and Satan were expelled from heaven (Al-Zamakhsyari, n.d.). According to Ibn Kathir, the expulsion of Prophet Adam from paradise was also followed by Eve, Satan, and the serpent. Although this interpretation, according to Ibn Kathir, originates from isra'iliyat (Al-Dimasqi, 1999). Adam's existence in an area of abundance, with sufficient food, clothing and shelter, as described in Surah al-Thaha verses 117-119.

As a result of Adam's mistake in eating the forbidden fruit, he was expelled from the paradise of abundance. He then had to work hard to fulfil his daily needs by farming, raising livestock, and so on. The prohibition against approaching the tree called khuldi by Satan was not actually the real name of the tree. According to al-Thabari, the name of the tree was Sunbulah (al-Thabari, 2000). Other scholars refer to it as the Zaitunah tree, al-Burr, al-Kurma, al-inab and al-Tin. According to al-Thabari, the text itself does not explain in the Qur'an or hadith the name of the tree that Adam was forbidden to approach. It is on this basis that the name of the tree has been given various interpretations (al-Thabari, 2000).

Another finding that reinforces the idea that Adam and his wife were not in a distant place, as commonly understood, is that the Qur'an does not use the word 'inzal,' which means to descend physically, as found in Surah al-Hadid verse 25 and Surah al-Nahl verse 65, which are interpreted as the descent of objects such as water or iron from a high place. The term used by Allah for Adam and his wife is "اهبطوا" (ihbid, inbithu or inbitha), as found in Surah al-A'raf verse 24 and Surah al-Baqarah verses 35-36, which also means to descend/slide down (physically over a short distance), depart, go, or leave. If it is understood that Adam descended like an object falling from far beyond the earth, then when Allah sent Adam down, it was similar to the mi'raj performed by the messenger from sidratulmuntaha descending to earth.

The word ihbit in the form of fi'il mudhari' and fi'il amar is found 8 times repeatedly. (al-Thabari, 2000). On this basis, the word "ihbitu" is not always interpreted as 'descending' from above to below. This can be understood from the use of ihbit when Prophet Moses freed the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's oppression in Egypt, until they settled in the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years. They were in a barren and dry field called the Tiah field. It was here that they received manna and salwa for their daily sustenance, as mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah al-Baqarah verses 57 and 159, and Surah Thaha verse 80.

"Ihbidthu" was used by the Qur'an to refer to Prophet Moses when he was on the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai Peninsula is at the same height as the surface of the sea as the Egyptian plains. Therefore, it is not appropriate to use ihbithu to mean 'descend' from above to below. The same expression was also used by the Qur'an when asking Noah to descend from the ship. The use of 'descend' in the verse refers to a place that is close or still within human sight, as found in Surah Hud verse 48. When Allah commanded Noah to descend from the ship, the verse did not use the word inzal with the meaning of 'descend' as in the descent of rain. Based on this argument, it follows that Adam and his wife did not descend from a distant place, but rather 'ihbithu' is interpreted to mean 'move away,' 'step aside,' or 'descend' over a short distance from high ground to low ground in a terraced structure, as found in Surah al-A'raf verse 24.

Classical interpreters such as Mujahid and Hasan, as quoted by al-Qurthubi, also interpret ihbithu as meaning to descend from above to below (Al-Qurthubi, n.d.). A similar understanding was expressed by Wahbah al-Zuhaili when interpreting ihbithu in Surah al-Baqarah verse 35 as meaning to descend (Wahbah al-Zuhaili, 1991). Similarly, al-Sya'rawi interprets ihbithu as meaning to descend, but the command to descend referred to in the verse is in unison or together between Adam, Eve and Satan. (al-Sya'rawi, 1997). Adam was sent down to Hindustan, Eve to Jeddah, and Satan to Mount Ubullah (a mountain located in the Basrah region) (Luluk Inda Rini Mufida dan Ghozi Mubarok, 2020).

Imam al-Alusy al-Bakhdadi also understood that the paradise inhabited by Adam was not eternal. According to al-Alusy, the famous paradise was a place where believers would receive their rewards on the Day of Judgement. The paradise provided for Adam was a paradise in another form that existed on earth (Al-Baqdadi, 2005). The same opinion was also expressed by Imam al-Razi, who said that the paradise inhabited by Adam was also the paradise on this earth, not the paradise in the heavens. Al-Razi put forward several arguments. First, the paradise in the heavens could not be entered by Satan, who deceived Adam. Second, anyone who entered the paradise in the heavens would never leave it again. The paradise in the heavens is eternal, not temporary like the one on earth. Fourthly, there is no disagreement among scholars regarding the creation of Adam in paradise on earth, but also no scholar argues that after being created on earth, Adam was then taken to paradise above the heavens by being lifted up. (Al-Razi, n.d.). The universal meaning of paradise lies not in its physical form, but in the values it embodies: security, peace, abundance, happiness and perfection. Consequently, the symbols of paradise can be contextualised in accordance with the cultural experiences of different communities without detracting from its theological dimension.

The story of Adam in paradise is repeated seven times in seven different chapters, with varying wording but the same substance (the seven chapters that tell the story of Adam are found in al-Baqarah, al-'A'raf, al-Hijr, al-Kahfi, al-Isra', Thaha and Shad (Al-Thahrawanah, 2004). However, in one surah it is described vaguely, while in another surah it is expressed clearly. The essence of the story of Adam and Eve in the Qur'an is how to grasp the moral ideas contained within it. Although, if we look closely, the discussion of Adam and Eve is scattered across several separate surahs. The differences in the expression of the story's content depend greatly on the context of the surah and the background of the story.

Allah describes paradise as a place of great beauty that delights the eye, which no one has ever known or experienced. This metaphorical heaven is illustrated by Allah as revealed in Surah Ali Imran verse 33, which states that heaven is as vast as the heavens and the earth. The Qur'anic expression that heaven is as vast as the heavens and the earth is a metaphorical phrase that describes the boundlessness of heaven that Allah has bestowed upon those who believe. According to Imam al-Syauqani, paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth is not an expression intended by Allah, but rather the intended meaning of that expression is a metaphor, not a literal meaning (Muhammad Ali al-Syauqani, n.d.). The vastness of heaven as a characteristic that describes the vastness of Allah's reward for goodness that encompasses from this world to the hereafter. Furthermore, the paradise described by Allah is a motivation to do good to humans and even to nature. In paradise, there is food in the form of fruits of different quantities, types, and flavours. All the pleasures found in paradise are endless, as described by Allah in Surah al-Ra'dua verse 35.

Meanwhile, the presence of angels should not be understood as physical female figures accompanying believers in heaven. Rather, it is merely a symbolic representation of incomparable pleasure for believers. Therefore, their physical form is not necessarily exactly like the imaginative metamorphosis of women as indicated in the Qur'an. Thus, the orientation of a person's worship is not only aimed at obtaining symbolic rewards. But the most important thing is how to obtain Allah's pleasure (M. Yusron, 2006).

The many verses in the Qur'an that describe paradise as a beautiful place with many trees and water are based on the empirical descriptions given by Allah to the Arabs who lived in hot, dry and arid areas (Khaldun, 2016). An illustration of Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, with rivers flowing with water, delicious fruits to eat, and other pleasures. The paradise illustrated by Allah is very appealing to people who live in arid climates and long for a pleasant life with trees to provide shade from the heat, flowing water in dry places, and so on, as described in the Qur'an (Ahmad Muzakki, 20155). Very symmetrical is the heaven described by God in the verses, with comfortable places, gardens and places of retribution (Muhammad Syariq, 2025).

The paradise described in the Qur'an is certainly very attractive to people living in deserts and arid regions, but not so attractive to those living in agricultural areas. They are used to seeing trees, fruits, vegetables, rivers and various other things that are not found in arid regions such as Arabia. For developing countries, knowledge, technology and a stable economy are aspirations that will continue to be pursued. Meanwhile, for countries that neglect justice, a sound legal system is something that is greatly desired. On this basis, the true concept of paradise is not as described in the Qur'an for Arabs with an unfavourable climate, but the reality of paradise can change according to the reality of the area where each person lives and what they dream of. All the pleasures of paradise will be given by Allah in the hereafter according to the good deeds done by each person, which is different from the paradise described for the Arabs.Imam Bukhari narrated a hadith from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said in a hadith qudsi that Allah said, 'I have prepared for My servants what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human mind has ever imagined (Maalim Yunus, 2020).

Maximum service in paradise, an abundance of food in the form of fruits and various drinks, various jewellery in the form of gold and diamonds, soft silk clothing, seats and couches facing each other, a spacious and comfortable paradise, and so on. All of the facilities mentioned above are illustrations of the position of kings with their various inherent rights. The description of heavenly services akin to those of kings is also inseparable from the socio-political context

surrounding Arabia, which was ruled by the Roman and Persian empires with all their splendour (Ilyas Daud, 2018).

The interpretation of paradise in a meaning different from what is mentioned in the Qur'an cannot be separated from the essence of paradise as the most beautiful place, which is certainly not rigid and monopolised solely for the needs of Arabs. The interpretation of paradise according to the different realities in each place and region opens up the possibility for the text of jannah (paradise) to be interpreted in a contemporary interpretive paradigm, one of the requirements of which, according to Abdul Mustaqim, is that it be contextual and oriented towards the spirit of the Qur'an (Abdul Mustaqim, 2010). The interpretation of the Qur'an using a rational approach cannot be separated from two main themes that need to be highlighted by an exegete, according to Ahmad Fuad Effendy, namely historical and linguistic issues(Ahmad Fuad Effendy, 2013). This interpretation is conducted openly, independently, and with a global orientation, considering the solutions offered in their contemporary form (Ramadan Aliti, 2021).

The interpretation of the term jannah found in the text of the Qur'an can be referred to by linguists with an understanding of its essence rather than its literal meaning. The essence of paradise is the pleasure given by Allah, even though it differs from what is expressed textually in the Qur'an. Bringing the meaning of jannah from the empirical through axioms and theoretical knowledge to a more universal meaning and essence is a necessity so that the meaning of paradise can become a fundamental and grand idea for all people who do good deeds. In light of this, there is a need to reorient interpretation away from a textual paradigm towards universal and timeless values (Arsal, 2016) in the form of contextual interpretation that can be adapted to various situations and circumstances(Qadafy, 2015). This interpretation needs to be further developed, both in terms of content and methodology (Mustaffa Abdullah, 2025). The ultimate purpose of paradise is resurrection after life on earth as a place of retribution. Second, the message of the coming of the Day of Judgement (sugra or kubra) and all the consequences that follow (Nailun Najah, 2018).

It is here that we see the interpretative model proposed, which links linguistic, historical and hermeneutical dimensions to produce a contextual reading of the verses on paradise that remains faithful to the text whilst remaining relevant to contemporary readers.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of al-Jannah in the Qur'an is not merely understood as a literal description of the afterlife, but also as a revelatory linguistic construct that engages in a dialectical relationship with the social, cultural and geographical context of the Arab community as the first recipients of the Qur'an. The symbols of paradise serve as a medium of divine communication that draws upon the empirical experiences of the Arab community to explain metaphysical realities without detracting from their transcendent nature.

The research findings confirm that the universality of the Qur'an lies in the values it embodies such as happiness, peace, security and perfection rather than in the physical form of the symbols of paradise. Therefore, the interpretation of paradise must be carried out contextually, distinguishing between the universal message of the Qur'an and the cultural medium used in its conveyance.

This study contributes to the development of a contextual exegetical paradigm through a sociolinguistic approach to eschatological verses, thereby bridging the metaphysical and empirical dimensions in understanding the concept of al-Jannah. Moving forward, similar studies could be extended to other eschatological themes through an interdisciplinary approach, with a view to enriching the methodology of contextual exegesis and reinforcing the universal relevance of the Qur'an's message.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors also express their sincere appreciation to Universiti Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi for the invaluable support and assistance provided throughout this research.

REFERENCES

Abdul Mustaqim. (2010). *Epistemologi Tafsir Kotemporer*. LKIs.

Ahmad Fuad Effendy. (2013). *Sudahkan Kita Mengenal al-Qur'an ?: Kajian Singkat dan Menyeluruh Ulum al-Qur'an*. Misykat Indonesia.

Ahmad Muzakki. (20155). *Stilistika al-Qur'an : Memahami Karakteristik Bahasa ayat-ayat Eskatologi*. UIN Maliki Press.

Aktobi Gozali. (2016). Proses Asal Kejadian Adam dalam Pandangan Achmad Baiquni; Sebuah Pendekatan Tafsir Ilm. *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, *2*(1), 86. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v2i1.15174

Al-Baqdadi, A. F. S. al-D. al-S. M. al-A. (2005). *Ruhul al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azhim wa Sab'u al-Matsani* (1st ed.). Mu'assasah al-Arabiyah.

Al-Dimasqi, A. F. I. ibn U. ibn K. al-Q. (1999). *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azhim* (3rd ed.). Dar al-Thaibah.

Al-Qurthubi, A. A. M. ibn A. al-A. (n.d.). *Jami' al-Ahkam al-Qur'an*. Mu'assasah Manahil al-Irfan.

Al-Razi, A. A. M. ibn U. ibn H. ibn H. al-T. al-R. al-M. F. (n.d.). *Mafatih al-Ghaib* (2nd ed.). Mu'assasah al-Arabiyah.

al-Sya'rawi. (1997). *Tafsir al-Sya'rawi* (7th ed.). Muthabi' al-Akhbar.

al-Thabari. (2000). *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (1st ed.). Muassasah al-Risalah.

Al-Thahrawanah, S. (2004). *Rahasia Pilihan Kata dalam al-Qur'an*. Qisthi Press.

Al-Zamakhsyari, A. Q. M. ibn U. ibn A. (n.d.). *al-Qasyaf* (2nd ed.). t.p.

Arsal. (2016). Menangkap Pesan-pesan Hukum Dalam al-Qur'an (Alternatif dan Solutif Penggunaan Metode Tafsir Kontekstual Dalam Menghadapi Kasus-Kasus Kontemporer). *Alhurriyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, *1*(1), 1. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30983/alhurriyah.v1i1.476

Bahi, B. (2020). The Arabic of the Holy Quran between the covenant of Arabs and the covenant of Quran. *Tadabbur Journal*, *5*(9), 177. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62488/1720-005-009-003

Deddy Ilyas. (2013). Antara Surga dan Neraka; Menanti Kehidupan Nan Kekal Bermula. *Pemikiran Dan Fenomena Agama*, *14*(2), 163.

Hamka. (1982). *Tafsir al-Azhar* (1st ed.). Panji Masyarakat.

Hanafi. (2017). Surga dan Neraka dalam Persepsi al-Ghazali. *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Uhsuluddin*, *3*(1), 40. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v3i1.15188

Hasanuddin Chaer, dkk. (2025). Metaphorical Symbols in Qur'anic Discourse: A Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis. *Suhuf: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, *37*(2), 319. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23917/suhuf.v37i2.12081

Husein ibn Muhammad al-Dhamaghani. (1980). *Qamus al-Qur'an*. Dar ilmu.

Ibnur Rijal Athi'ullah, dkk. (2023). Resistance of the Al-Qurṭubī to the Interpretation of Jannah in Qs. Al-Baqarah: 35 as a Place on Earth. *Atturast; Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, *10*(2), 191. https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v10i2.6451

Ilyas Daud. (2018). Surga di dalam Hadis; Menemukan Pesan Moral Dibalik Keindahan Surga [Paradise in the Hadith (discovering the Moral message behind the beauty of Paradise]. *Farabi*, *18*(2), 2018.

Khaldun, I. (2016). *Muqaddimah ibn Khaldun*. Pustaka Firdaus.

Luluk Inda Rini Mufida dan Ghozi Mubarok. (2020). Isra'iliyyat dalam Tafsir Modern; Studi tentang Turunnya Adam dari Surga [Isra'iliyyat in Modern exegesis; the study of Adam's descent from Paradise]. *Jurnal Mutawatir*, *20*(2), 375. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2020.10.2.365-389 Muta

M. Shahrur. (2004). *Dialektika Kosmos dan Manusia, Dasar-dasar Epistemology Qurani*. Nuansa.

M. Yusron. (2006). *Studi Kitab Tafsir Kotemporer*. Teras.

Maalim Yunus. (2020). Descriptions Of Heaven In The Last Third Of The Qur'an. *Islamic Sciences Journal*, *11*(3), 179. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25130/jis.20.11.3.7

Moh, N. M. (2020). Rekonstruksi Budaya Patriakhi dalam Visualisasi Surga (Analisis Historis Linguistik)[Reconstruction Of Patriarchal Culture In The Visualization Of Heaven (Linguistic Historical Analysis]. *Kafa'ah*, *10*(1), 53.

Muhammad Ali al-Syauqani. (n.d.). *Fath al-Qadir* (1st ed.).

Muhammad Fu'ad Abdul Baqi. (n.d.). *Mu'jam al-Mufahras li al-Faz al-Qur'an al-Karim*. Dar al-Fikr.

Muhammad Syariq. (2025). The Representation of 'Judgment Day', 'Heaven' and 'Hell' in The 29 th Chapter of The Holy Qur'an: A Semantic study. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, *8*(8), 107. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2025.8.8.9

Muhammad Zubir. (2022). Social Community in the Quran (A Study of Muhammad Abduh's Interpretation in Tafsir Al-Manar). *Islam Transformatif: Islam of Islamic Studies*, *6*(1), 45. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30983/it.v6i1.5506

Muhammad Zulfikarullah. (2017). Surga dalam Literatur al-Qur'an [paradise in the Qur'an]. *Al-Burhan*, *17*(1), 100. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53828/alburhan.v17i1.86

Mustaffa Abdullah, dkk. (2025). Quranic Exegesis Studies in Malaysia: Realities, Challenges and Future Direction. *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, *26*(1), 22. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5779

Nailun Najah. (2018). Otentisitas Bahasa al-Qur'an dan Pemaknaan Bidadari Surga (Respon Stefan Wild terhadap Hipotesi Luxenberg)"[The authenticity of the Qur'anic language and The Meaning Of The Angel Of Heaven (Stefan Wild's response to Luxenberg's hypothesis]. *Kabilah*, *3*(1), 134.

Nurcholish Madjid. (1992). *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban; Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan dan Kemodernan*. Paramadina.

Qadafy, M. . (2015). *Sababun Nuzul dari Mikro hingga Makro Sebuah Kajian Epistemologi*. InAzna Books.

Ramadan Aliti. (2021). Application of Design Thingking for Quranic Exegesis. *International*

Journal of Islamic Thought, *20*(2), 123. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.20.2021.216

Saidin Mansyur. (2018). Konsep al-Qur'an tentang Surga [Qur'anic concept of Paradise]. *Jurnal Al-Asas*, *1*(2), 3. file:///C:/Users/htn/Downloads/920-2090-1-SM.pdf

Shihab, M. . (2005). *Tafsir al-Misbah; Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an vol. 9* (4th ed.). Lentera Hati.

Wahbah al-Zuhaili. (1991). *al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Akidah wa al-Syari'ah wa al-Minhaj* (1st ed.). Dar al-Fikr.

Wildan Taufiq. (2008). Idiologi dibalik Simbol-simbol Surga dan Kenikmatannya dalam Ayat-ayat al-Qur'an [The Ideology Behind The Symbols Of Paradise And Its Pleasures In The Verses Of The Qur'an]. *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra*, *20*(2), 2.

Yusuf Ali Tantowi, dkk. (2025). Bridging Classical Arabic Rhetoric and Cognitive Linguistics: A Systematic Review of Kinayah and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. *Ta'lim Al'arabiyyah*, *9*(2), 269–287. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15575/jta.v9i2.52061

AUTHOR BIODATA:

HELFI (Corresponding author)
Postgraduate Studies, UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri)
Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi,
Sumatera Barat, Indonesia.
Email: helfi@uinbukittinggi.ac.id

AHMAD YUNUS MOHD NOOR
Research Center for Theology and Philosophy,
Faculty of Islamic Studies, and
Senior Associate Research Fellow,
Institute of Islam Hadhari,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600, UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.
Email: a_yunus@ukm.edu.my

FAJRUL WADI
Faculty of Sharia, UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri)
Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi,
Sumatera Barat, Indonesia.
Email: fajrulwadi74@gmail.com

SOFIA RIDHA
Faculty of Sharia, UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri)
Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi,
Sumatera Barat, Indonesia.
Email: sofiaridha@uinbukittinggi.ac.id

SHAFRA
Faculty of Sharia, UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri)
Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi,
Sumatera Barat, Indonesia.
Email: shafra@uinbukittinggi.ac.id