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ON IBLIS: COULD HE HAVE KEPT SILENT?

Rashid Al-Balushi¹

Abstract: This paper addresses an issue raised by a number of *Qur'ānic* verses which assert that the Divine command for the prostration to Adam was issued to the angels only, and also by the verse which clearly states that Iblis is from the Jinn (i.e., not an angel), as well as by the verse which explicitly states that Allah had commanded Iblis to prostrate to Adam. The reference to this command in this last verse explains why, though not directly addressed with the command, Iblis had to react to the command (he rejected to prostrate, showed arrogance, and vowed to mislead Adam and his offspring). We review some of the available accounts of this issue, and provide an account according to which Iblis had to either prostrate or reject the command, that is, he could not have kept silent, and this is because a Divine command, by nature, includes those directly addressed as well as those present where the command is issued, and probably everyone else in the universe.

Keywords: *Divine Command, Prostration to Adam, Iblis: Angel or Satan, Rejection and Arrogance, Hostility to Adam.*

INTRODUCTION

The seven verses that narrate the Divine command to the angels to prostrate to Adam (pbuh), in (1-7), clearly state that the command was issued to the angels, and show that it does not include Iblis. He is not included in the command because he was not an angel, but rather from the Jinn race, as the third sentence of verse (50) of sūrat al-Kahf (The Cave, 18:50) in (5) states. Besides, the fourth sentence of the same verse reveals another

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fact about Iblis, one which indicates that he was not an angel, which is the fact that, like human beings, but unlike the angels, he can have offspring.

1. "And We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam;" they bowed down, except for Satan. He refused, was arrogant, and was one of the disbelievers (34)."¹ (The Cow, 2:34)
2. "We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels: "Bow down before Adam;" so they bowed down, except for Satan; he was not of those who bowed down (11)." (The Elevations, 7:11)
3. "Your Lord said to the angels: "I am creating a human being from clay, from molded mud (28) When I have formed him, and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down prostrating before him (29)." So, the angels prostrated themselves, all together (30) except for Satan. He refused to be among those who prostrated themselves (31)." (The Rock, 15:28-31)
4. "When We said to the angels: "Bow down before Adam," they bowed down, except for Satan. He said: "Shall I bow down before someone You created from mud? (61)"" (The Night Journey, 17:61)
5. "We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam." So, they bowed down, except for Satan. He was of the jinn, and he defied the command of his Lord. Will you take him and his offspring as lords instead of Me, when they are an enemy to you? Evil is the exchange for the wrongdoers (50)." (The Cave, 18:50)
6. "And when We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam," they bowed down, except for Satan; he refused (116)." (Ṭā-Hā, 20:116)
7. "Your Lord said to the angels: "I am creating a human being from clay (71) When I have formed him, and breathed into him of My spirit, fall prostrate before him (72)." So, the angels fell prostrate, all of them (73), except for Satan. He was too proud, and one of the faithless (74)." (Ṣād, 38:71-74)

These facts, together, raise the following question: Since Iblis was not addressed with the command to prostrate to Adam (since he was not one of the angels), would Allah have cursed him, dismissed him from the Garden and promised him Hellfire, if Iblis had kept silent (i.e., remained passive)? Differently stated, the verses in (1-7) all report that

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the *Qur'ānic* translation is retrieved from: <https://www.clearquran.com/>

the command was issued to the angels; thus, Iblis, being from the Jinn race, was not expected to carry out the command, but these same verses also state that Iblis did not keep silent.

That's right; Iblis "refused, was arrogant, and was one of the disbelievers (2:34)," and said: "I am better than he [Adam]; You created me from fire, and You created him from mud (7:12)," "I am not about to prostrate myself before a human being, whom You created from clay, from moulded mud (15:33)," "do You see this one whom You have honoured more than me? If You reprieve me until the Day of Resurrection, I will bring his descendants under my sway, except for a few (17:62)," and "by Your majesty, I will seduce them all (38:82) except for your loyal servants among them (38:83)."

Also, if Iblis did not show arrogance, disobedience, and hostility, but did not prostrate either, would Allah Almighty have addressed him as such: "Then get out of here! You are an outcast! (77) and My curse will be upon you until the Day of Judgment (78) (38:77-78)," and "the truth is, and I say the truth (84) I will fill Hell with you, and with every one of them who follows you (85) (38:84-85)," taking into account the fact that the Divine command of the prostration to Adam (pbuh) was issued to the angels, as the verses in (1-7) show?

In other words, though Iblis was not addressed with the command, he rejected it, showed defiance and arrogance as well as disobedience to Allah, and also showed hostility to Adam and his descendants. This means that Iblis felt, or perhaps was certain, that the Divine command also included him, though all the relevant verses, i.e., those in (1-7), clearly state that it was issued to the angels only. This feeling, or rather certainty, on the part of Iblis that he was commanded by Allah Almighty to prostrate to Adam is confirmed by verse (12) of *sūrat al-A'raf* (The Elevations, 7:12), in (8).

8. "He [Allah] said, "What prevented you from bowing down **when I have commanded you?**" He said, "I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from mud" (12)".

This problem is thus summarized as follows: Allah Almighty mentions that He commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, and that Iblis is from the Jinn race, which means that he was not addressed with the command. Nonetheless, Iblis refused to prostrate to Adam, feeling that he was addressed with the command, despite what the

verses in (1-7) express, and this 'feeling' is supported by verse (7:12) in which Allah Almighty states that He had commanded Iblis to prostrate to Adam, which, in fact, explains why he did not keep silent.

So basically, Iblis was commanded to prostrate to Adam (pbuh) though he was not addressed with the command of the prostration to Adam; what do we make out of this problem? That is, how was he included in the command though not addressed with it?

Before we provide a solution to this problem, we will survey some of the available exegesis books and present their proposed solutions. Since there are some 80 exegesis books, and we have to include their interpretations of the seven relevant verses, I will restrict this investigation to only five arbitrarily selected exegesis books, one from *ummahāt al-tafāsīr* (al-Ṭabarī), one from the Ahl al-Sunnah scholars (Abū Ḥayyān), one from the Ibādī sect (al-Khalīlī), and two from the contemporary interpretations (Ibn ʿĀshūr, and al-Shaʿrāwī).

THE PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS

In the following subsections, I will present the different views on the problem that this paper is trying to resolve (i.e., how it is that Iblis was commanded when he was not addressed with the command), and the different arguments for those views. Since this highly critical incident is discussed in seven sūras (The Cow, The Elevations, The Rock, The Night Journey, The Cave, Ṭā-Hā, and Ṣād), and to avoid repetition, I will present the views and arguments associated with verse (34) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:34); the presentation will also include any other relevant details or views and arguments mentioned in the interpretations of the other six verses.

2.1. *Al-Ṭabarī*

In his interpretation of verse (Q. 2:34), al-Ṭabarī states that Allah commanded his angels to prostrate to Adam. Then He exempted Iblis from those who prostrated, and this exemption indicates that he was one of the angels.¹

¹ Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Cairo: Dār Hajar for printing, publication, distribution, and advertisement, 2001), 1:535.

Al-Ṭabarī also discusses the views of other scholars, like Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn Jurayj, Said ibn al-Musayyab, Qatādah, and Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, who claim that Iblis was an angel created from fire, and belongs to a tribe of angels called ‘Jinn.’ They were called Jinn because they were guards of the ‘Jinān’ (Gardens), or because they were unable to be seen (Janna and ijanna mean ‘to hide’),¹ and was known for seeking knowledge and being obedient; he lived on earth and was responsible for the planet and its sky.²

Al-Ṭabarī also mentions the views of al-Ḥasan and Ibn Zayd, who maintain that Iblis has never been an angel, and that he is the origin of Jinn just like Adam is the origin of mankind, since, like humans, Jinn can have offspring. Also, Shahr ibn Ḥawshab and Sa‘d ibn Mas‘ūd, states al-Ṭabarī, claim that the Jinn inhabited earth before mankind, and that the angels fought against the Jinn and killed many of them and kicked others out of the planet, but that Iblis was taken captive when he was young, and so he lived with the angels and worshiped Allah, until Allah commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam.³

Al-Ṭabarī concludes the discussion by saying that the view that Iblis is not an angel is based on the fact that Allah informed us that He created him from fire as well as the fact that He told us that Iblis is from the Jinn race, and so it is inappropriate to assume that he belongs to another race of creatures. The other reason for this view, he continues, is that Iblis may have children, but the angels may not. However, al-Ṭabarī seems to be of the view that there could be more than one race (or variety) of angels, some created from light and some from fire (since Allah did not tell us in the Qur’ān what he created the angels from), some able to have children and some are not, etc....⁴ That the angels were created from light is stated in the Ḥadīth in (9).⁵

¹ ALAC [Arabic Language Academy in Cairo], *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ* (Cairo: International Sunrise Press, 2004), 140-141.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:535-539.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:539-541.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:542-543.

⁵ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1991), “al-Zuhd wa al-Raqā’iq”, 2996; <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2996>

9. "The Angels were born out of light and the Jinns were born out of the spark of fire and Adam was born as he has been defined (in the Qur'ān) for you (i.e., he is fashioned out of clay)."

Al-Ṭabarī repeats the same views and arguments in his interpretation of verse (50) of sūrat al-Kahf (The Cave, 18:50).¹ Although we agree that Allah has the ability to create more than one race of angels, from different materials and with different specifications, we find no reason for why that is the case, since the main duty of angels is to worship Allah and obey Him, that is, they are incapable of being disobedient to Him, and so they should be similar in their basic trait, creatures with one option, which is obedience.

2.2. *Abū Ḥayyān*

In his interpretation of verse (34) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:34), Abū Ḥayyān cites the same scholars that al-Ṭabarī cites, and mentions the two views on Iblis, the first being that he was an angel who disobeyed Allah and was then cursed, and so became a Satan, and the second that he has never been an angel, but is the origin of Jinn and their father, captivated when young by the angels and was worshipping Allah with them, and was also included in the command with them.²

Abū Ḥayyān mentions arguments for the view that Iblis is not an angel. The first is provided by verse (1) of sūrat Fāṭir (Originator, 35:1), in (10), which states that Allah assigns the angels messenger roles, and since human Messengers do not disobey Allah, then if Iblis were an angel (who could have also been a messenger), then he could not have disobeyed Allah, but he did.

10. "Praise be to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Maker of the angels messengers with wings—double, triple, and quadruple. He adds to creation as He wills. God is Able to do all things (1)."

The second piece of evidence is provided by verse (6) of sūrat al-Taḥrīm (Prohibition, 66:6), in (11), in which Allah states that angels never disobey Allah, and since Iblis has disobeyed Allah, then he is not an angel.

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 15:285-290.

² Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:303.

11. "O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire, whose fuel is people and stones, over it are angels, fierce and powerful; they never disobey God in anything He commands them, and they carry out whatever they are commanded (6)."

The third piece of evidence comes from verse (50) of *sūrat al-Kahf* (The Cave, 18:50), in (12), which clearly states that Iblis is from the Jinn race, not an angel. The last argument he mentions comes from the second part of the same verse, in (13), which is that Iblis may have children, unlike the angels.

12. "We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam;" so, they bowed down, except for Satan; he was of the jinn, and he defied the command of his Lord (50)."
13. "Will you take him and his offspring as lords instead of Me, when they are an enemy to you? Evil is the exchange for the wrongdoers."

Despite these arguments, Abū Ḥayyān states that it seems that Iblis is an angel because he was expected to prostrate, and this is because he was addressed with the angels, otherwise, he would not have been blamed. Abū Ḥayyān then responds to verse (1) of *sūrat Fāṭir* (Originator, 35:1) and verse (6) of *sūrat al-Tahrīm* (Prohibition, 66:6) by saying that angels are obedient and submissive to Allah because He had designed them to be so, not because of their own will, and so Allah is able to strip them of their angelic qualities, which He did with Iblis (whom He bestowed upon Satanic qualities), according to Abū Ḥayyān, which caused him to be arrogant and disobedient.¹ Nonetheless, we find no reason for why Allah would do that to Iblis if Iblis were an angel, a creature who is not subjected to accountability. In fact, Allah would not force a specific action or deed on a human being, an accountable creature, so why would He force an action on an angel and cause him to go to Hellfire; this approach contradicts not only logic but also the fact that Allah is the most merciful, most gracious.

Abū Ḥayyān also responds to verse (50) of *sūrat al-Kahf* (The Cave, 18:50) by saying that Allah called Iblis Jinn because Jinns are a tribe of angels created from fire, or because Jinn means that, like the angels, he cannot be seen.² This view is supported by the interpretation of the word 'al-Jinnati' (الْجِنَّةِ) in verse (158) of *sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (The Aligners,

¹ Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1:303.

² Ibid.

37:158), in (14), to refer to the angels, since those scholars linked this verse to verse (57) of sūrat al-Nahl (The Bee, 16:57), in (15). In other words, whom they call the daughters of Allah (exalted is He), who are the angels in verse (Q. 16:57), are the same as the Jinnah in verse (Q. 37:158).

14. “And they invented a relationship between Him and the jinn [al-Jinnati]; but the jinn [al-Jinnati] know that they will be arraigned (158).”
15. “And they attribute to God daughters – exalted is He – and for themselves what they desire (57).”

But the same word, Jinnah [al-Jinnati], is used to refer to the Jinn in verse (6) of sūrat al-Nās (Mankind, 114:6), in (16). Thus, the relevant question here is: Why would Allah use the same word to refer to two different classes of creatures, obedient angels and disobedient Satans, especially when one of these two classes already has a special label, which is ‘angels’?

16. “From among jinn and among people (6).”

Also, al-Khalīlī states that Arabs used to claim that the angels, not the Jinn, are the daughters of Allah, exalted is He. Al-Khalīlī is of the view that verse (158) of sūrat al-Şāffāt (The Aligners, 37:158) does not refer to the angels, and says that many scholars disagree with the view that jinnah refers to the angels.¹

Nonetheless, Abū Ḥayyān states in his interpretation of verse (50) of sūrat al-Kahf (The Cave, 18:50) that it seems that Iblis is not an angel, after all, but rather a Jinn, and cites al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation, according to which the sentence ‘Iblis was a Jinn’ provides the justification for why he did not prostrate to Adam, and for why he disobeyed; that is, if he were an angel, he would not have disobeyed Allah since angels are incapable of wrongdoing ‘infallible’, unlike Jinns and mankind.²

2.3. Al-Khalīlī

In his interpretation of (Q. 2:34), al-Khalīlī mentions both views on Iblis, that he is an angel and that he is a Jinn, ascribing both to their proponents, and providing fair critique.

¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥamad al-Khalīlī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr: Anwār min Bayān al-Tanzīl* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Istiqāmah, 1988), 3:73.

² Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 6:129.

Al-Khalīlī himself is of the opinion that Iblis is a Jinn, given verse (50) of sūrat al-Kahf, and also because unlike angels, who were created from light, given the Ḥadīth in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, cited in (9), and to whom masculinity and femininity are irrelevant, and so may not have descendants, Iblis is created from fire, given verse (27) of sūrat al-Ḥijr (The Rock, 15:27), in (17), and may have children, given verse (50) of sūrat al-Kahf. Another argument indicating that Iblis is not an angel, continues al-Khalīlī, is provided by the verses that clearly state that angels never disobey Allah, like verse (49) of sūrat al-Naḥl (The Bee, 16:49), in (18).¹

17. “And the jinn We created before, from piercing fire (27).”

18. “To God bows down everything in the heavens and everything on earth – every living creature, and the angels, and without being proud (49).”

He then cites Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Al-Qayyim, and agrees with them that “Iblis was with the angels in his own shape and his different nature, since he is from fire and they are from light.”² And since Iblis is not an angel, then he is like mankind, created with the ability to obey and disobey, and so he chose to disobey the Divine command and vowed to seduce Adam and his offspring, out of envy and jealousy.

2.4. Ibn ‘Āshūr

In his interpretation of verse (34) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:34), Ibn ‘Āshūr states that Iblis was not from the race of angels; he cites verse (Q. 18:50) “So they bowed down, except for Satan; he was of the jinn,” and argues that Allah made his character like that of the angels, so that he will be able to live with them and behave like them. Ibn ‘Āshūr also states that (Q. 2:34) indicates that Iblis was also addressed in the Divine declaration that Allah was going to place a successor on earth, and also included in the Divine command of prostration to Adam (pbuh). This inclusion of Iblis in the declaration and command was because there was only one individual from the Jinn race, but all the other addresses were angels.³

¹ Al-Khalīlī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr*, 3:72-73.

² Al-Khalīlī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr*, 3:74.

³ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ‘Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tunisiyyah for publication, 1984), 1:423.

Commenting on verse (11) of *sūrat al-A‘rāf* (The Elevations, 7:11), Ibn ‘Āshūr states that this verse indicates that Allah created in the soul of Iblis a disposition that prompts him to disobey when he does not like something, and allowed him to have desires and an opinion; thus, his nature was different from that of the angels. It thus appears that Iblis stayed with the angels because he was behaving well, since nothing went against his desires, until he was asked, among the angels, to prostrate to Adam, which allowed his inherent disobedience to appear.¹

2.5. *Al-Sha‘rāwī*

Al-Sha‘rāwī states that the fact the Iblis was able to disobey Allah’s command to prostrate to Adam is the evidence that he was not an angel, since angels are compelled to obey Allah, whereas Jinns have been granted the freedom of choice. In other words, Iblis was able to reject the command because, like mankind, he had been given the freedom of choice, whether to obey or disobey.²

Al-Sha‘rāwī also states that the Divine command included Iblis, since Allah states in verse (12) of *sūrat al-A‘rāf* (The Elevations, 7:12), in (19), that he indeed commanded Iblis to prostrate to Adam. He also states that the fact that Iblis was present with individuals of a higher status, who are the angels, was sufficient justification for him to prostrate (even though the Divine command was issued directly to the angels). In other words, since the command was issued to the higher status individuals, the lower status one, Iblis, should have carried out the command without argument.³

19. “He said: “What prevented you from bowing down when I have commanded you?” He said: “I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from mud” (12).”

In his interpretation of verse (11) of *sūrat al-A‘rāf*, *al-Sha‘rāwī* states that the fact that Allah exempted Iblis from those who prostrated to Adam is evidence that he was commanded among the angels. He also uses the statement of verse (50) of *sūrat al-Kahf* as evidence that Iblis is not an angel, but rather a Jinn. The reason why Iblis was included

¹ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 8:2;39.

² Muḥammad Mitwalli *al-Sha‘rāwī*, *Tafsīr al-Sha‘rāwī* (Cairo: Maṭābi‘ Dār Akhbār al-Yawm, 1991), 256.

³ *Al-Sha‘rāwī*, *Tafsīr al-Sha‘rāwī*, 256-257.

in the Divine command with the angels, argues al-Sha‘rāwī, is that he committed himself to the obedience and worship to Allah though he had the freedom to disobey Allah, while the angels were compelled to obey Allah and worship Him, which indicates that Iblis, the Jinn, is equal to angels, or even of a higher status, because he obeyed though he could disobey; and being of a higher status means that he should have insisted on carrying out the command. And suppose that he was of a lower status compared to the angels, continues al-Sha‘rāwī, this means that he should have carried out the command that his superiors carried out.¹

THE NEW ACCOUNT

3.1. Background assumptions

Based on the previous accounts, we assume that Iblis was not an angel, but rather from the Jinn race, and that he devoutly worshiped Allah with the angels. We also adopt the view that the Jinn race inhabited earth before mankind, and that they did very evil deeds, and, as a result, Allah sent the angels to fight them. This view is supported by the reaction of the angels when Allah Almighty told them that He was going to create someone and appoint them as ‘a successor on earth;’ the angels’ reaction is stated in the second sentence of verse (30) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:30), in (20).

20. “When your Lord said to the angels: “I am placing a successor on earth,” they said: “Will You place in it someone who will cause corruption in it and shed blood, while we declare Your praises and sanctify You?” He said: “I know what you do not know” (30).”

Before we present our solution to this problem, we will comment on an issue related to the angels being informed about the new creature and addressed with the command to prostrate to him. Al-Sha‘rāwī states that the command to prostrate to Adam included only the angels whose duties are related to mankind (as well as Iblis), like those who will record our deeds and those who will protect us from Satans (i.e., those who will serve human beings in their mission on earth), but the command did not include those angels

¹ Al-Sha‘rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha‘rāwī*, 4061.

who carry the Throne and those who guard the skies.¹ And that is why, continues al-Sha‘rāwī, when Iblis refused to prostrate to Adam, Allah said to him the latter part of verse (75) of sūrat Ṣād (Ṣād, 38:75), in (21).

21. “He said: “O Satan, what prevented you from prostrating before what I created with My Own hands? Are you too proud, or were you one of the exalted?” (75).”

I disagree with al-Sha‘rāwī, and believe that all the angels were addressed with the Divine command. For one thing, the two (out of the seven) verses in which Allah Almighty informs the angels to prostrate to Adam after He made him and *breathed into him of His Spirit*, which are (29) of sūrat al-Ḥijr, in (22), and (72) of sūrat Ṣād, in (23), are in the two (out of the seven) sūras that affirm that *all the angels, all of them*, bowed to Adam, since these two verses were followed by the verses in (24-25), (30) from sūrat al-Ḥijr and (73) from sūrat Ṣād, respectively.

22. “When I have formed him, and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down prostrating before him (29).”
23. “When I have formed him, and breathed into him of My spirit, fall prostrate before him (72).”
24. “So, the angels prostrated themselves, all together (30).”
25. “So, the angels fell prostrate, all of them (73).”

The fact that these two latter verses include two quantifiers each, “كُلُّهُمْ” and “أَجْمَعُونَ”, as the Arabic versions show in (26-27), respectively, may be a signal that all the angels, regardless of whether they provide services to mankind or not, were commanded to prostrate and that all of them did.

26. فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ (30).
27. فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ (73).

These two sūras are also the only two (out of the seven) sūras in which the Divine command is stated in the third person, referring to Allah as the Lord; the command in these two sūras is: “**Your Lord said to the angels,**” but it is: “**We said to the angels**” in the other five sūras. This may be to signal that since He is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth, then all the angels, all of them, regardless of their location, were commanded

¹ Ibid.

and so prostrated. Therefore, all the angels prostrated, those who are going to provide services to mankind, and those who are not, and not just *in obedience to Allah and to honor the new learning creature*, but also *to prostrate to the Divine Spirit breathed into Adam*.

Besides, other scholars are of the opinion that all the angels prostrated to Adam. Ibn ‘Āshūr, for example, interprets ‘exalted’ to mean ‘honored,’ that is, ‘are you too honored to prostrate to Adam?’¹ Also, Abū Ḥayyān interprets ‘exalted’ to mean those of a better origin, which is why, continues Abū Ḥayyān, Iblis said ‘I am better, I was created from fire, and he from clay.’² Likewise, al-Ṭabarī interprets ‘exalted’ to mean ‘of superiority and arrogance over your Lord.’³ Al-Khalīlī states in his interpretation of verse (34) of sūrat al-Baqarah that he is against understanding ‘the exalted’ to mean a special class of angels; he maintains that the command was issued to all the angels.⁴

Before we proceed to the proposed solution, we would like to present another argument that Iblis was from the Jinn race and not from the angels. This argument comes from a possible understanding of the latter part of verse (34) of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:34), in (28). The new understanding is based on the view that the Arabic preposition *min* (من) should be translated as ‘from’ rather than ‘of,’ and thus the last sentence in (Q. 2:34) should read ‘[Iblis] was from the disbelievers,’ to mean that he belonged to a race of creatures who disbelieved in Allah and did bad deeds, which led them to deserve Allah’s punishment that ended their term of succession on earth, a view supported by the claim that Jinns inhabited the earth before mankind.⁵ In other words, it is as if the sentence reads ‘Iblis refused and was arrogant, as he was one of the disbelievers;’ that is, his refusal and arrogance were not unexpected given the fact that he belonged to a disobedient race.

28. “He [Iblis] refused, was arrogant, and was one of the disbelievers (34).”

¹ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 23:303.

² Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 7:392.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 20:145.

⁴ Al-Khalīlī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr*, 3:69.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:540-541.

3.2. The proposed solution

Considering the solutions presented in section 2, I lean more towards the two solutions provided by al-Sha'rawī. Basically, if Iblis considered himself of a higher status compared to the angels (since he is obedient though he can disobey), then he was supposed to be the first to carry out Allah's commands, even before the angels; also, if Iblis considered himself of a lower status compared to the angels (since he is one and they are many, and he was not meant to live in the Garden, but on earth), then he should have obediently carried out the command that superior creatures, the angels, willingly carried out.

But what if Iblis considered himself to be equal to the angels? In this case, his decisions will be solely controlled by his inherent nature, being a creature with a free will, compared to the angels, who are submissive to Allah's will. The nature of Iblis eventually determined his decision, despite the place he lived in and the company he lived with.

To make our approach to this problem clearer, we will start with an illustrative context. Let's say that at some school function or ceremony, where students and teachers are present, the school principal asks some students to do something, like "Go and get the certificates (to be awarded to the winners) from my office!" Here, we expect the students, who are addressed by the principal, to jump and carry out the principal's command. Let's now assume that the same function is attended by the Minister of Education, and it is the Minister who issues the command this time to some students to "go and get the certificates from the principal's office;" who do we expect to get up and carry out the command. In this case, we should expect the addressed students together with some teachers and even perhaps the school principal himself to go get the certificates.

Now, let's suppose that the King is attending the same school function, and that at some point, he asks the same students together with a couple of teachers to go get the certificates from the principal's office; in this case we should expect the addressed students and teachers as well as the principal and the Minister himself to carry out the command, even though the principal and the Minister are not addressed with the command. The rhetorical question now is: What if the issuer of the command is the King of Kings, the Owner of the Dominion? In this case, everyone in the universe is included in the command.

The three situations in the previous paragraphs illustrate a simple notion, to be stated as follows: the higher the status of the command issuer, the more urgency will be felt by the attendants, those explicitly included in the command and those not included in it, which will result in those not addressed with the command to also carry it out.

Therefore, since “Allah sets the Highest Example; He is the Mighty, the Wise (16:60),” and since He is the Creator, and consequently the Commander and the Prohibitor in His universe, at least whoever is present where He issues His commands is responsible for the carrying out of those commands, even if they are not directly addressed.

Now, how did Iblis know that he was included in the command of prostration to Adam, even when he was not explicitly addressed with the command? To address this question, I will claim that Iblis knows of Allah and His commands and prohibitions more than we do. He had been around before the human race was created, he lived on earth with his fellow Jinns and later in the Garden, and he mingled with the angels and was knowledgeable enough about their duties, and as a result, he had a good idea about how Allah manages His universe.

Besides, Iblis knows what he was created from, and also what Adam was created from, as verse (76) of sūrat Ṣād (Ṣād, 38:76), in (29), shows. Also, Iblis was there, attending the whole dialogue between Allah and the angels, and knew the purpose of creating Adam, so that he and his offspring will be tested, unlike the angels, since Adam was taught the names of all things, as verses (30-33) of sūrat al-Baqarah, in (30) show. Moreover, Iblis knew that Adam was endowed with the learning intellect, which is crucial for the privilege of making choices and decisions, a privilege that the angels do not have. Iblis knew about the great mission of Adam and his offspring from the fact that Allah called Adam a ‘successor on earth’ (probably because the Jinn race had been the former successor on earth), and also because He asked the angels to prostrate to him, signaling the great mission assigned to him and his descendants. Abū Ḥayyān states that by asking the angels to prostrate to Adam, “Allah wanted to show the advantage of knowledge over worship.”¹ And since Iblis was worshipping Allah and also learning, he felt envy and jealousy, being inferior to the new creature who was honored with knowledge.

¹ Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 1:301.

29. "He [Iblis] said: "I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from clay (76)."
30. "When your Lord said to the angels: "I am placing a successor on earth," they said: "Will You place in it someone who will cause corruption in it and shed blood, while we declare Your praises and sanctify You?" He said: "I know what you do not know (30)." And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then he presented them to the angels, and said: "Tell Me the names of these, if you are sincere (31)." They said: "Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is you who are the Knowledgeable, the Wise (32)." He said: "O Adam, tell them their names." And when he told them their names, He said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal? (33)." (2:30-33)

Besides, Iblis knows about Allah's test to the human race, and knows that the human race may be misled (given the ability to make choices and decision which comes with the learning intellect), which is why he vowed to mislead as many of them as possible, as verses (26-44) of *sūrat al-Hijr* (The Rock, 15:26-44), in (31), show. This is probably because, as many sources suggest, the Jinn race inhabited earth before us, and were endowed with the ability to make choices and decisions, but they spread corruption and shed blood; that is, they chose the misled path.

31. "We created the human being from clay, from molded mud (26). And the jinn We created before, from piercing fire (27). Your Lord said to the angels: "I am creating a human being from clay, from molded mud (28)." "When I have formed him, and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down prostrating before him (29). So the angels prostrated themselves, all together (30). Except for Satan. He refused to be among those who prostrated themselves (31). He said: "O Satan, what kept you from being among those who prostrated themselves?" (32) He [Iblis] said: "I am not about to prostrate myself before a human being, whom You created from clay, from molded mud (33)." He said: "Then get out of here, for you are an outcast (34)." "And the curse will be upon you until the Day of Judgment (35)." He said: "My Lord, reprieve me until the Day they are resurrected (36)." He said: "You are of those reprieved (37)." "Until the Day of the time appointed (38)." He said: "My Lord, since You have lured me away, I will glamorize for them on earth, and I will lure them all away (39)." "Except for Your sincere

servants among them (40).” He said: “This is a right way with Me (41).” “Over My servants you have no authority, except for the sinners who follow you (42).” “And Hell is the meeting-place for them all (43).” “It has seven doors; for each door is an assigned class (44).” (15:26-44)

Therefore, Iblis had to either prostrate or reject the command, and since he is from the Jinn race, which, like the human race, is given the freedom of will and choice, he chose to reject the command and be our enemy whose goal is that he not be the only one to deserve the Hellfire penalty. He wanted company, and knew that his company will be from the races with the free will, both Jinn and human beings, as verse (179) of *sūrat al-A‘rāf* (The Elevations, 7:179), in (32), shows, but not the angels. And that’s why he is doing his best to take revenge on the race that was behind him deserving Allah’s curse and dismissal from the Garden.

32. “We have destined for Hell multitudes of jinn and humans. They have hearts with which they do not understand. They have eyes with which they do not see. They have ears with which they do not hear. These are like cattle. In fact, they are further astray. These are the heedless (179).”

Thus, in response to the question in the title of this paper, then, Iblis could not have just kept silent; he had to either prostrate to Adam (pbuh), being implicitly included in the command, or reject the command. One logical question in this regard is: Did Allah Almighty mislead Iblis (into disobedience, arrogance, and vowing to mislead Adam and his descendants), so that the role of Iblis, as a misleader, would provide the test for mankind’s faith (i.e., are they going to obey Allah or obey Iblis)? In fact, Iblis said this, as stated in verse (16) of *sūrat al-A‘rāf* (The Elevations, 7:16), in (33).

33. “He said: “Because you have lured me, I will waylay them on Your straight path (16).”

Nonetheless, I believe that this is just a false accusation, since if Allah Almighty needed to lure Iblis into the sin so that he would provide the test to our faith and obedience to Allah, then Allah *needs* the help of Iblis to manage His universe, and this is

not true.¹ That Allah Almighty is not in need of anyone is actually proven by Iblis himself when he vowed to seduce mankind, as verse (82) of sūrat Ṣād (Ṣād, 38:82), in (34), shows. Verse (82) of sūrat Ṣād is provided in its Arabic version, in (35), transliterated in (36), to illustrate the key word, *‘izzah*, which received different translations, as shown in (37-39).

34. “He [Iblis] said: “By Your majesty, I will seduce them all (82).”

35. .(82) قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

36. ‘qāla fa-bi-‘izzatika la-’u-ghwiy-anna-hum ’ajma’in’.

37. “[Iblis] said: By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all (82).”²

38. “Satan said: “By Your Glory! I will certainly mislead them all (82).”³

39. “(Iblis) said: “Then, by Thy power, I will put them all in the wrong (82).”⁴

Although the word *‘izzatika* (عِزَّتِكَ) is translated as ‘Your Majesty’, ‘Your might’, ‘Your Glory’, and ‘Your Power, the true meaning of *‘izzah* is ‘self-sufficiency’; that is, it represents the fact that Allah does not need any of His creatures for any matter or affair. Al-ghaniyy (الغني) means ‘His resources may not run out of anything’. Al-Sha’rāwī states, in his interpretation of verse (82) of sūrat Ṣād: “by Your might and your not needing your creation and their obedience and faith.”⁵ Iblis vowed, not by Allah’s name, but by the very Divine attribute that reveals that he is certain that Allah does not need mankind nor Iblis, nor anyone else. He, the Omnipotent, is capable of running His universe, as stated in the last two sentences of verse (21) of sūrat Yūsuf (Joseph, 12:21), in (40).

40. “God has control over His affairs, but most people do not know (21).”

This thus undermines the view that says that Iblis had been an angel, and that Allah stripped him of his angelic qualities and assigned him satanic ones, so that he would reject the command and disobey Allah. This unreasonable approach to the problem

¹ This statement by Iblis in the *Qur’ān* is a false accusation, not different from the statement by Pharaoh when he said that he was the supreme God, as stated in verse (24) of sūrat al-Nāzi‘āt (The Snatchers, 79:24), in (i).

i. “He [Pharaoh] said: “I am your Lord, the most high” (24).”

² <https://myislam.org/surah-sad/>

³ <https://quran.com/38>

⁴ <https://www.surah.my/38>

⁵ Al-Sha’rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha’rāwī*, 13004-13005.

supports the view that Allah creates the deeds and compels His creatures to carry them out, which is the defining feature of the deviant *Jabriyya* doctrine.¹

Therefore, the answer I see most appropriate to the question of whether Allah lured Iblis is: No. Although Allah knew (given His absolute Omniscience) that Iblis was going to reject the command and show arrogance, and as a result vow to mislead the offspring of Adam as an act of revenge, Allah did not cause Iblis to reject the command. This is because Allah does not compel responsible creatures (like humans and Jinns) to behave in a certain way. In other words, Allah does not make choices and decisions for creatures that will be held accountable for their deeds on the Day of Judgment; they have to be their chosen deeds, performed with the complete will and full awareness of those creatures. The fact that Allah knew that Iblis was going to reject the command and be the misleader of mankind is understood from the last sentence of verse (30) of *sūrat al-Baqarah* (The Cow, 2:30), in (41).

41. "He [Allah] said: "I know what you do not know" (30)."

And the reason for what Iblis did, we believe, is that his life before the advent of the age of mankind was in paradise, figuratively speaking, with angels who worshipped Allah, who were programmed to obey Allah, who did not compete with Iblis for anything, and whom he could not mislead. But with the arrival of Adam and his offspring, Iblis felt rivalry since Adam is of a higher status than even the angels, since Allah asked them to prostrate to him, which incited envy and jealousy in Iblis. In other words, the nature of Iblis as a creature programmed with the inclination for both paths, good and evil, took over at a moment when he felt competition with a similar race of creatures, mankind.

Thus, a natural question in this regard is as follows: what if Iblis prostrated to Adam (and did not show hostility and became our misleader whose main goal is to take us to Hellfire with him), what would be our misleader? The misleader in this case would be two things, the human soul (النفس الأمارة بالسوء) itself, since the human soul had been

¹ L. Holtzman, "Debating the doctrine of jabr (compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya reads Fakhr al-Din al-Razi," *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, ed. Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer and Alina Kokoschka. (Boston: De Gruyter, 2013) 61-93.

inspired with both wickedness and righteousness, as verses (7-8) of *sūrat al-Shams* (The Sun, 91:7-8), in (42), show.

42. "And the soul and He who proportioned it (7). And inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness (8)." (91:7-8)

The other source of misguidance is the human desire for deviance (الهوة), mentioned in many verses, like (40) of *sūrat al-Nāzi'āt* (The Snatcher, 79:40), in (43). The human soul finds this burning desire very appealing, for different reasons, among which are the fact that the wrong choice is easier to make (having less or no obligations), the feeling that the penalty is not immediate (it is on the Day of Judgment), as well as the belief that people are going to live long enough, and so they may repent and return to Allah later in their lives.

43. "But as for him who feared the Standing of his Lord, and restrained the self from desires (40)."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we raised the question of why Iblis felt urgency to either carry out the Divine command of prostration to Adam or reject the command though he was not explicitly included in the command. After reviewing the available accounts of solutions to this problem, we said that since Allah is the Owner of the Dominion, to Whose will and command all creatures in the universe are subjected, Iblis had no choice but to either prostrate to Adam or show disobedience and arrogance. We also responded to the claim that Iblis was an angel whom Allah had lured (as Iblis claims) and turned into a Satan. This claim is untenable for two reasons; the first is that it implies that Allah needed Iblis for a plan (which is seducing mankind, to test their faith in and obedience to Allah), and Allah needs virtually no one; the second reason is that no other creature is needed to test the faith and obedience of mankind, since their own souls, which had been inspired with both righteousness and crookedness, are capable of luring them into committing sins.

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