

Six or eight days of creation?

Sura 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, and 25:59 clearly say that God created "the heavens and the earth" in six days. But then there is also the following passage:

2 Say: Is it that ye deny Him Who created the earth in **TWO Days**
And do ye join equals with Him? He is the Lord of (all) the Worlds.

+

He set on the (earth), mountains standing firm, high above it,
and bestowed blessings on the earth, and measure therein all things
4 to give them nourishment in due proportion, in **FOUR Days**
in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (Sustenance).

Moreover He comprehended in His design the sky,
and it had been (as) smoke: He said to it and to the earth:
"Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly."
They said: "We do come (together), in willing obedience."

+

2 So He completed them as seven firmaments in **TWO Days**,
and He assigned to each heaven its duty and command.
And We adorned the lower heaven with lights,
and (provided it) with guard.
Such is the Decree of (Him) the Exalted in Might, Full of Knowledge.
-- Sura 41:9-12 (Yusuf Ali)

= 8 altogether these are **EIGHT Days**.

Two days for the creation of the earth, then four days to fill the earth with mountains, blessings and nourishment for all its inhabitants, and in the end two more days to create the seven heavens and create the stars in them. This adds up to 2+4+2 = 8 days in contradiction to the 6 days mentioned in the other verses.

The structure is very clear: These are the three "layers" which are created bottom up:

***	FIRMAMENTS	[the sky, the "roof" over the earth] in 2 days

: -)	BLESSINGS	[filling the earth with everything needed for life] in 4 days

===	The EARTH	[the foundation] completed in 2 days

Yusuf Ali starts out his commentary with "This is a difficult passage..." before he tries to explain away the problem. But it just doesn't look like the first two days are part of the four day period since the second period presupposes the existence of the earth which is now to be filled after it had been created.

Had the first period been four and the second two days, the second could be included in the first, since "filling the earth" is part of "creating the earth", but the other way around doesn't make sense. The earth that isn't existing yet cannot be filled. But mathematically it is just not possible to include four days in two days. And it is very clear from the text that the first two days are connected with "creating" the next four days are characterized by "putting ON it", "bestowing on it", "giving them".

That verse 9 and 10 describe different stages is further supported by the text structure since the two phases are "separated" by the second line of verse 9 asking a rethorical question to the listener/reader based on what has been done

in this first stage. Before it goes on to look at the second stage of creation.

That is how the structure of the text presents itself (to the reader without an agenda to fit it into six days).

The full explanation from Yusuf Ali's footnote 4470 is:

The Commentators understand the "four Days" in verse 10 to include the two Days in verse 9, so that the total for the universe comes to six Days. This is reasonable, because the processes described in verses 9 and 10 form really one series. In one case it is the creation of the formless matter of the earth; in the other case it is the gradual evolution of the form of the earth, its mountains and seas, and its animal and vegetable life, with the "nourishment in due proportion", proper to each.

As explained, I don't think this explanation is acceptable. But I would welcome a clearer presentation based on the text by anybody who can give one.

Yusuf Ali reports this as THE opinion of the commentators. For the major commentators there does not even seem to exist the possibility of this second attempt below given by some Muslims to reconcile the number of days from eight to six:

Here, the commentators generally have been confronted with this question: If it is admitted that the creation of the earth took two days and the setting up of the mountains and placing of the provisions and blessings in it took four days, and the creation of the heavens, took another two days, the total number of the days would be eight, whereas at several places in the Quran Allah has said that the creation of the earth and heavens took six days in all. (For example, see 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, and 25:59). This question can easily be answered as follows:

The two days of the creation of earth are not separable from the two days in which this universe as a whole was created. If we consider the following verses, we see that in them the creation of both the earth and the heavens has been mentioned together, and then it has been stated that Allah made the seven heavens in two days. These seven heavens imply the whole universe, one part of which is also our earth. Then, when like the other countless stars and planets of the universe this earth also took the shape of a unique globe within two days, Allah began to prepare it for animate creatures, and in four days created in it all those provisions, which have been mentioned in the above verse.

It is interesting to note that this second theory is sharply contradictory to the (usual) one given by Yusuf Ali, who includes the first two days in the second period of four days.

Why did Yusuf Ali not think that explanation was at least worth mentioning? In other difficult passages he does give several options on how different scholars have explained it. The very fact that there exist contradictory explanations defies the above remark that this problem could "easily" be explained this way.

Anyway. Above I have expressed my doubts about the validity of Yusuf Ali's "harmonization", So let me explain why this explanation also falls short of being satisfactory for several reasons:

The beginning of verse 11 is translated by Pickthall and Shakir by "THEN turned he to the heavens..." which does for sure indicate a temporal sequence. For example Pickthall:

Then He turned to the heaven, which was only smoke at that time. He said to the heaven and the earth:
"Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly."

It is specifically said, that the heavens were only smoke "at that time" (as this translation says it) or "when IT was smoke" or "and IT was vapor" (as others say) [i.e. no stars and planets formed together yet out of the smoke], which is stated in contrast to the earth whose formation was already finished as described in the immediately preceding verses. If all of it were to be smoke and the forming of the earth and the heavens is a parallel action, then it would have to be something like "He turned to the heavens and the earth, when THEY were only like smoke ..." but that is not so, the smoke stage explicitly only refers to the heaven while the earth is addressed as a "finished" entity when God calls heaven and earth together. The earth was finished, only the firmament or "roof" was left to be finished up, and "all of it to be pulled together".

Six or eight days of creation?

Is that not a fair interpretation?

That the earth is finished before God turns to the creation of the heaven is confirmed in Sura 2:29 which says,

He it is Who hath created for you all that is on earth.

Then He turned to the heaven, and made them into seven heavens.

This makes again clear that all that is in/on the earth is created BEFORE God turns to the creation of the seven heavens. God cannot create things ON the earth before the earth itself is in existence. The Qur'an explicitly denies the second of the above proposed theories trying to solve the problem by indentifying the first and the last two days.

Having gotten a Muslim's response that the word "thumma" translated above as "then" can also mean "and" and not necessarily indicates an "after" in time, I want to respond that in this verse, the meaning is crystal clear to be a sequence. It doesn't even depend on the word "then" but the verb itself indicates the sequence of doing one thing and then TURNING to the next. If several tasks are done parallel then there is no "turning" from one to the other.

Furthermore, there is yet to be found a verse in the Qur'an where "thumma" does signify a "parallelism" and not a "sequence".

The existence of contradictory explanations is always the result of confusion and the sign that no theory is really fitting the data. If one explanation would really make full sense, then all others would have been abandoned long ago. This is not the case. The problem is still there and there is no solution that really captures the features of the text as it is given into a coherent interpretation.

I acknowledge that I am not able to read the Arabic and I investigated this passage from the English translations only but the translators are experts in the Arabic language and usually one can trust them. I invite anybody who can give a clear exposition based on the (Arabic) text which makes good sense and solves the problem. But reading several translations which all agree on the basic features of the text, I do feel that my interpretation is coherent with the text, and all would be fine if this were the only text in the Qur'an about creation of heavens and earth, but since other Qur'an passages say that it was six days and not eight, therefore it is indeed a rather obvious problem.

But this scenario also has its scientific problems. If we want to believe that the earth was fashioned and filled with life first before the "smoke" was gathered into forming the heavens [stars, planets] then this contradicts very clearly all (current) scientific theories of astronomy.

Further there is a hadith in Sahih Muslim, Chapter MCLV, *The beginning of creation and the creation of Adam*, [Hadith No. 6707](#):

Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Messenger (mpbuh) took hold of my hands and said: Allah the Exalted and Glorious, created the clay on Saturday and He created the mountains on Sunday and He created the trees on Monday and He created the things entailing labour on Tuesday and created light on Wednesday and He caused animals to spread on Thursday and created Adam (pbuh) after 'Asr on Friday; the last creation at the last hour of the hours of Friday, ie. between afternoon and night.

From Saturday to Friday there are **seven days**. Now this doesn't say that these are all the days of creation, but there are **at least seven days**, maybe eight or more. But it does disagree without reconciliation with the account of the six day creation. And within these seven days Allah hasn't done anything on the heavens yet.

[Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 3, Number 1041 & 1042](#) also mention the creation of Adam on Friday. This does not square with the interpretation of days as "long periods". A Friday is not longer than a day and the other weekdays are not either.

In Tafsir Al-Jalalyn we find this explanation:

41:9 2 days meaning Sunday and Monday

Six or eight days of creation?

41:10 4 days meaning Tuesday and Wednesday

[fourth day instead of four days? he declares it to be two days, clearly in order to avoid just the above pointed out difficulty. He probably means that God created "the earth AND what is in it" in 4 days, just as Yusuf Ali reports it as the general opinion of the commentators.]

41:12 2 days meaning Thursday and Friday.

In any case, we do see that both the above quoted hadith as well as this tafsir take the days literally, contradicting several "modern Muslims" who rather want to interpret these days as "periods" or "epochs". But obviously Muhammad himself as well as the early commentators did not see it that way.

The tafsir in contradiction to the hadith seems to confess that Saturday is the Sabbath [day of rest] like in the Bible.

[Muslim Responses](#)

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)
[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

Further debate on the number of days in creation:

A Muslim Response by [Randy Desmond](#)

I had talked with a scholar of the Qur'an about this who is also native speaker of Arabic. The fact is that "thumma" can mean "furthermore." (I had mistakenly heard the scholar as saying "therefore" and had posted a response based on that mistranslation which Jochen showed did not make sense with respect to Surah 2:29. I checked back and I was at fault. I have since been corrected on that point, and I apologize for any confusion caused. Needless to say, I am also embarrassed) Looking back at the original verses at the top of the page, we see Jochen has it translated as "Moreover". So Jochen actually had the right translation all along.

As for the comment by Jochen

Furthermore, there is yet to be found a verse in the Qur'an where "thumma" does signify a "parallelism" and not a "sequence".

If we look at Surah 102. You will notice "thumma" is used twice (verses 3 and 4, and verses 6 and 7). In Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation it is translated as "again", and it signifies a parallelism (in fact the same things).

Thus, knowing that in the Qur'an the number of days of creation is six in all other places, we can know what meaning to apply to "thumma." And if we care to take notice, we will find that the heavens and the earth were also created concurrently...

Surah 21:30

"Have not the disbelievers seen that the heavens and the earth were one piece and We parted them? And we made every living thing from water. Will they not then believe?"

Jochen mentions this alternate meaning of "thumma" ("furthermore/moreover") and rules it out by saying that God then turned to the heavens. The implication being that turning is a sequential act. The problem is that only the "then" meaning of "thumma" would indicate a sequential time domain dependency. The result is we know "He turned" but we don't know when. "He turned" is one word in Arabic and does not imply any sort of sequential activity. It only denotes an activity that happened in the past.

Now, going on to verse 11 of surah 41, if you have the Arabic along side the English, you will see the first word has a round letter with a dot above it and a slash above that. That prefix is what has been translated as "so" at the top of this web page. The meaning of that

prefix is that what comes next is a conclusion based on what has already been given - like the English word "so". This "so" in no way implies a time dependency like a time dependent "then". Now please notice that the Qur'an is concluding, "So He completed them as seven firmaments in two days".

Taking all the verses which talk about the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, it becomes obvious which meaning of "thumma" fits the data best. Therefore, any claim that a contradiction exists is purely speculative at best and ignores all the data.

As for conflicting with scientific theories, when we don't ignore other verses in the Qur'an regarding the subject matter the "contradiction" dissolves and the meaning can fit with scientific theories of astronomy.

Okay, the "embarrassing version" is removed. And my comment on it as well. But I have to point out that I am not ignoring **all** the data. On the basis of what did I do my exposition? It wasn't Shakespeare's Hamlet. I have looked in quite some detail at several Qur'an passages.

I know that Muslims have to come up with some response to this. I feel it is pretty weak. If normal language has any definite meaning then my interpretation is rather straight forward. Does Arabic not have words to express something like "at the same time"? The above harmonization is extremely forced. Does he really want to read Sura 2:29 as

He it is Who hath created for you all that is on earth.

Moreover (and at the same time as creating the earth and everything on it) He **turned to** the heaven, and made them into seven heavens.

You decide for yourself whether **turning to** together with **then** or with **moreover** makes a better translation. Both in Surah 41 and here the natural interpretation seems to be the one I presented. Harmonization with the "six day creation verses" does force this artificial construction. It is an *ad hoc* argument and not convincing in my eyes. If the creation of the heavens is indeed supposedly concurrent then the verb "turning to" is an extremely odd choice of words.

Maybe I am willing to trade this contradiction for the admission that the Qur'an is indeed very unclear and quite hard to understand ... contradicting the statement that it is in **clear** Arabic.

In regard to the remark on Surah 102: We find there a repetition of the same statement several times, making it **again** and **again**, and that means it is said several times one **after** the other. It is the sequence of utterance. The event referred to is one and the same, that is true, but the "thumma" is justified nevertheless because it structures a **sequence**. And it still is nowhere used in connection to several parallel events. Here it is only **one** event, referred to in a **sequence** of repetitions, one coming **after** the other.

Arabic dictionary entry on [thumma](#).

In regard to "parting the earth and the heavens" as proof for the concurrent creation, that is argument from silence. is "parting" the same as creating, forming and filling? It doesn't seem so. In Sura 41 again,

as discussed above, there is first the **creation** of the earth and subsequently the **filling** of the earth as seen in 41:9 and 10. So maybe Allah first "parted" them, then did all his forming and filling work on the earth, and then does do the details of forming and filling on the heavens. But this is not indicated anywhere to be concurrent. How long does "parting" take? And still you have not explained why all the major commentators include the first two days with the next four, and not as you do the first two concurrent with the last two. Were they all not able to understand the Arabic properly? Did they maybe indeed read *thumma* to mean "then" and this was not an option for them?

Actually it is seemingly getting worse all the time. Thanks for pointing out this verse. I hadn't seen that before. Look again at these two verses [41:11 & 21:30](#) and see how a new contradiction arises before our very eyes.

Another response:*

God created the universe in 6 days & the next 2 days were for final touches

Further responses on other sites: [[*](#), [*](#)]

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)
[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

The meaning of *thumma*

Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet [The Dictionary]

Volume One

Page 105

المُعْجَمُ الوَسِيطُ
الجزء الأول
صفحة ١٠٥

{ثُمَّ}: حرف عطف يدل على الترتيب مع التراخي في الزمن ، كقوله تعالى : {وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ
الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ . ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ .
ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ . }

Translation

(Thumma [Then]): A letter of Atf [an Arabic grammatical classification] indicating sequence [in order] with a pause in time [between the two things in the sequence], like in the Most Exalted's [Allah's] saying: {He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay. And *Thumma* made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised: But *Thumma* He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him something of His spirit} [Yusuf Ali, in reference to Quran verses 32:7-9].

Phrases between normal () parentheses are in the original text, while the ones between square [] brackets are mine.

As you see, Thumma (then) definitely means a sequence in order.

I just realized something, it's kind of funny actually how I'm trying to prove that Thumma must indicate sequence and order using a dictionary. It just like trying to prove in English that "then" indicates sequence and order. You know, if you come up to an Arab and ask him if Thumma may not indicate sequence or order he'll just laugh.

Arabic Dictionary

[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

Quick or Slow Creation?

We find in the Qur'an

7:54

Lo! your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, ...

Many Muslims in recent days try to become modern in their interpretation and bring the six days into line with cosmology and its currently proposed 15 billion years as age of the universe. So, they claim that the word for day does not only mean day, but can mean period, or even eon. And they even claim that the Qur'an is on this very much in line with science in this regard,[1] [even though the earlier commentators and Muhammad himself took the creation days to be literal 24 hours week days.](#)

Yet the Qur'an makes another statement about the speed of Allah's creation:

2:117

The Originator of the heavens and the earth!

When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: "Be!" And it is.

Does this aya not say that God creates instantaneous? Does this really leave room for billions of years of development?

Six days are still pretty quick and acceptable in the range of "Be! And it is" given the massive size of the universe and the complexity of life ..., but wouldn't it be quite a stretch to translate Sura 2:117 as "When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it **only**: Be! And it finally came to pass after about 10 billion years."?

And he said to Adam: "Be! And as evolution went its way, after about 3 billion years, Adam emerged."

Again, this can be harmonized with a dose of good will. But these contradiction pages are written for those Muslims who have little good will and who insist on a literal reading of the Bible so that contradictions may emerge. Therefore, insisting on a literal reading of the Qur'an, we manage to do just the same.

Notes:

1. For example on [Shabir Ally's page](#).

See also our [Qur'an and Science](#) section.

[A Muslim response](#) which forgets to take into account that the understanding of "yawm" as ordinary week days are not just those of fallible scholars, but the understanding of Muhammad himself as pointed out in the link above. The author then added a [comment on the above hadith](#).

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)

[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

Heaven or Earth, which was created first?

He it is Who hath created for you all that is on earth.

Then He turned to the heaven, and made them into seven heavens. -- Sura 2:29

Sura 41:9-12 also gives details on the creation process and confirms that the earth was created first and then the heavens. But then we read also:

Are you the harder to create, or is the heaven that He built?

He raised the height thereof and ordered it;

and He has made dark the night thereof, and He brought forth the morn thereof.

And after that, He spread out the earth. -- Sura 79:27-30

[A Muslim Response](#)

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)

[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

Further debate on the issue:

[A Muslim's Response](#) by [Randy Desmond](#)

Date: Tue, 8 Oct 1996 14:47:13 PDT

The reader has to understand two things:

First, the word translated "then" is the Arabic word "thumma". It can be rendered "Moreover/Furthermore". Jochen shows this in his web page disputing the number of days of creation. I mention it again in my response to that page. It is also true that "thumma" can be rendered "then" (as in a subsequent "and").

Second, the Arabic word for "he turned" can be rendered as "he turned", "he has turned", or "he had turned". The implication being a past action has occurred. See "Written Arabic - An Approach to the Basic Structures" by A.F.L. Beeston (cost about \$25.00), Chapter 3, note 22.

So what does this mean with respect to the verses quoted by Jochen?

It means that Surah 2:29 may be read as follows:

He it is Who created for you all that is on the Earth.
Furthermore, he had turned to the heaven and had made them
into seven heavens.

That is an acceptable translation of the Arabic and it does not conflict with Surah 79:27-30. In fact if we assume it "thumma" means "then", the sentence could potentially be awkward. (i.e. "...then he had turned...")

So which is the most accurate rendering? I assume there is no contradiction in the Qur'an and so if I can find a legitimate context that renders all the data coherent, I accept that as a proof that **contradiction has not been proven**. I don't think anyone can claim "contradiction" on anything unless there is no alternative explanation which legitimately explains why a proposed contradiction is not a contradiction.

Continuing, if you look at Jochen's page on the number of days of creation you will see that my response to that supports my argument here. Then look at my response to Jochens page on the heavens and earth ripping apart (if my response has been posted - as I write this I'm not sure if it has), you will further see that the whole creation story is cohesive when we take all the data into account. I will grant the reader that this exchange between Jochen and I may be disjointed and a bit confusing, but please, take all the information into account. To say it is contradictory or confusing is not taking into consideration that translations may be the point of confusion and not

the Qur'an.

If these are the kinds of things Jochen has encountered from Muslims attacking a the Bible, his feelings reflected in his purpose statement are understandable. Although I do question his intent and methods for venting these feelings. It seems questions about these "contradictions" should be asked before accusations ensue (or appending "...more to come..." on the webpage - that is a bit presumptuous).

Now, having said all that, I came up with some guide lines we can apply to any book to prove/disprove contradictions. Let me know if you think it is fair.

Is there ever a context for which the proposed contradictory statements are not contradictory?

If it seems that the statements are still contradictory, ask the following:

Have I made any unverified assumptions?

Have I considered all possible definitions of the words?

Have I considered all possible translations of the words?

Have I considered all grammatical syntatic definitions/renderings?

Do you agree that if we answer NO to the first two questions and YES to the last three questions, then we would seem to have a contradiction?

So if, after considering all of the above information, we still have a contradiction, then we can conclude that there is a problem. (Note: this is addressing internal contradictions of a document, I have not thought whether this is also a relevant guideline for external contradictions). Not being scholars in the matters, we could then even consult scholars in the matters and see what they have to say. If after all this there is still a problem. So be it.

Let me also point out that proving contradictions is much harder than disproving them. So, working with the assumption that there is none and conclusively proving a contradiction is a much more credible approach than vice-versa. Now I hope that we can apply these ideas to both the Qur'an and Bible. That is the most fair and I hope it addresses Jochen's concern regarding Muslims which have made attacks

Heaven or Earth, which was created first?

on the Bible. We are not in the business of slandering other religions, we are in the business of seeking knowledge and sharing it. Well, that is my opinion. Is it agreeable? God knows best.

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)
[Answering Islam](#) home page

Calling Together or Ripping Apart?

Then He turned to the heaven, which was only smoke at that time. He said to the heaven and the earth: "**Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly.**" -- Sura 41:11

Have not the disbelievers seen that **the heavens and the earth were one piece and We parted them?**

And we made every living thing from water. Will they not then believe? -- Sura 21:30

Here does arise the question: Have heaven and earth first been of one piece which Allah then parts, or have they first been far apart so that He has to call them together?

[A Muslim Response](#)

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)

[Answering Islam](#) Home Page

Further debate on the issue:

Muslim Responses by [Randy Desmond](#)

Date: Fri, 18 Oct 1996 04:52:00 PDT

In Surah 41:11, "come ye together" is, according to the Arabic, like if we were to call to people at the same time (i.e. we would call them together). This is not a melding together. It is not understood that way at all.

Nevertheless, I understand why you may jump to that conclusion. I read A. Y. Ali's comment and he understands the verse to be mentioning that the heavens and earth, once created, were meant to be kept together, not separate. However, he doesn't say he understands them to be joined together as one unit as Surah 21:30 says. I really do not know what A. Y. Ali means. Perhaps arranged together? In any case, regardless what A. Y. Ali's interpretation is, the Arabic is clear.

Let me stress the point, the Arabic word in Surah 41:11 means "come both of you", and then God asks them to submit. In Surah 21:30, the arabic means "one piece". To summarize, it is only the translation which could even give someone the idea that there is a contradiction. This is a reason why a Muslim does not regard translations of the Qur'an as the Arabic Qur'an itself.

[Contradictions in the Qur'an](#)
[Answering Islam](#) Home Page