



## Is the Human Death A Result of Adam's Sin? A Comparative Study of Quran and Bible on Death

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### Abstract

The story of the Original Sin that is Adam and Eve and their sin of eating from the Forbidden Fruit is mentioned in the Bible as well as the Quran. . Although there are some similarities in the narration of this event in these holy books, there are some nuances in some significant points. One of the significant differences is the consequences of Adam's Original Sin in eating the Forbidden Fruit. Traditional narratives of the Bible emphasize human death as one of these consequences. This belief has been considered one of Christian theology's fundamental assumptions. However, there is no narrative in the Quran. This paper discusses that human physical death is not necessarily the result of Adam's Sin, as narrated in Torah. Instead, the spiritual death that is considered a result of human sin is the consequence of Adam's Original Sin, like other human sins. Despite some Christian interpretations that completely changed the story, this study shows that the Torah's statement is entirely interpretable and reasonable. In this respect, the Quran has never mentioned anything about Adam and his progeny's physical and spiritual death. Instead, the Quran states that merciful God forgave his fault in eating the Forbidden Fruit, and God will never punish people for the sins of others; thus, sin is not hereditary.

### Keywords

Quran, Bible, Death, Sin.

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## **Introduction**

The issues such as life, death, and destruction and achieving pure and eternal life, health, prosperity, and redemption have permanently been significant concerns of humanity. Traditionally and theologically, one of the critical elements in the Bible that have impacted beliefs on human death is the story of Adam and Eve, which has typically been considered a fundamental subject and paradigm for many discussions and perceptions regarding human life and death. Adam and Eve's temptation, their sin of eating from the Forbidden Tree, and their eventual descent to the earth are significant in holy books in Abrahamic religions. Quran and Torah have narrated this story in detail. Also, in the New Testament, the Book of Paul has narrated this story and has reinterpreted it in new ways.

Despite some resemblances in the narration of this event in these holy books, some crucial themes differ. One of the significant differences in the consequences of Adam's sin --i.e., human death as God's punishment. As we will see in this paper, human physical death is not the consequence of Adam's sin in the Torah. Instead, the spiritual death is an expected outcome of human sin, emphasized in the Old and New Testaments as the consequence of Adam's sin. This clarification for the account of the Torah is comparable and adaptable despite some certain traditional interpretations and perceptions in the Book of Paul.

## **Physical Life and Physical Death in the Bible**

In the holy book of Judaism, Tenakh or Tanakh, also known as the Old Testament, as a part of the Christians' Bible, the types of life and death of the human being are indicated. In the Torah, after the creation

of heavens and the earth, God began the creation of man and gave him life:

"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Torah, Genesis 2:7)

In the opposite of this life granted to the human being, there is physical death as a separation between the soul and body. As the bible states:

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Eccl 12:7)

### **Spiritual Life and Spiritual Death in the Bible**

Besides the physical life and death, both books of the Old or New Testament have mentioned spiritual life and spiritual death several times in different words. Here, we would instead write a few extra sentences that explain precisely what we mean by the term 'spiritual death because it may be misleading (Kulikovsky, 2001). Anyway, Bible discusses another type of life that is considered hard to be achieved, which is called spiritual life:

"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:14)

Terminologically, spiritual death is a separation between man and God which has greater significance than physical death:

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you that He will not hear." (Isa 59:1-2).

"The person [soul] who sins will die (spiritually)." (Ezek 18:4,20)

For example, the proverbs of Solomon in the Old Testament

mentions some sins, which lead to spiritual death. (Prov. 2:16-19<sup>1</sup> 6:32-33 25: 1-7<sup>3</sup>) In these aphoristic statements, many various points have been discussed, which will be mentioned briefly as follows:

- 1- Attention to some advice would lead to preserving the spiritual life.
- 2- The soul (spiritual life) of a prostitute is destroyed.
- 3- Also, a person who goes around a whore, will not be able to achieve the ways of spiritual life.

So, traditionally, the Jews believe that obeying the commands of God and observing His laws and practices can preserve their spiritual life. For example, as a religious practice, the head covering serves as a reminder that the *Shekinah* (the Divine Presence) is the Omnipresent God and, in reciting a *Berakhah*, becomes a basis for the spiritual life (Fuchs, 2012). Also, there are several statements in the New Testament that emphasize the significance, difficulty, and value of the spiritual life:

"I tell you the truth if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." (John 8:51).

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\. "It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life."

Υ. "But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroy himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away."

Υ. "My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not."

"He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal (spiritual) life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of (spiritual) death into (spiritual) life." (John 5:24)

"And this is what he has promised us—even eternal life." (John 2:25)

Undoubtedly, this eternal life must be spiritual, not physical, because humans die physically. Even prophets and Jesus are no exceptions. Jesus said:

"Follow Me, and allow the (spiritually) dead to bury their own (physically) dead." (Mat 8:2)

These statements show that the believers continue to live spiritually forever in the presence of God, even when they die physically. Generally, spiritual death is considered as the result and consequence of sin:

"For, the wages of sin is (spiritual) death..." (Rom 6:23).

These verses are speaking about spiritual death, not physical death, as Bible says:

"But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." (Tim 5:6).

The Lord Himself taught how the righteous could prevent their spiritual death:

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11/25-26)

According to the statements mentioned in the New Testament regarding the spiritual death, it indicates a state of separation between the Creator and individual created spirit beings. Thus, Satan is spiritually dead in Biblical expressions, although he continues to exist as God's archenemy (Gurney, 2001). Therefore, according to the Old

Testament (in Isa 59:1-2 and the New Testament in Eph 2:1,5<sup>1</sup>), sins, as the separation of the law of God, bring about a separation between the man from God -- i.e., the spiritual death. Nonetheless, spiritual death has not been precisely mentioned in the Scripture (Gurney, 2001).

### **Is the Physical Death a Consequence of Adam's Sin in the Bible?**

The Old Testament, unlike Bible, does not talk about the transmission of hereditary sin and its consequences (Merriam-Webster's, 1999). According to the Book of Genesis, God warns that if Adam and Eve eat from the Forbidden Tree, they will die:

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen 2:17)

In this verse of the Book of Genesis, God tells that when Adam eats from the forbidden tree, he will "surely die." However, when Adam does fall to the earth, his physical death does not occur immediately. Thus, God must have had another kind of death in mind, i.e., spiritual death. They died spiritually and separated from the presence of God when they ate Forbidden fruit. This separation from God is seen precisely in the Book of Genesis (3:8), when Adam and Eve heard the voice of God and hid from the presence of God. Their union with God had been broken, and they were spiritually dead....

Also, the price the male would have to pay was that of working hard to eke out a living (Genesis, 3:17-19). In other words, death was not included in the price! The narrator merely stated that the man would pay the price until death (Spangenberg, 2013). Moreover, God has

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\. "And you were (spiritually) dead in your trespasses and sins ... "

not necessarily desired man to have eternal life in the first place :

"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis, 3:22).

This verse shows that God has not wanted man to know the good and evil, but He has not desired man to have eternal life, and this was not considered as the punishment of man's sin yet. Moreover, Adam failed to obtain and eat a tree of eternal physical life. So, anyhow, he could not obtain eternal physical life only to lose it later. Undoubtedly, this tree must be for physical life because the man successfully ate, while he may have eternal spiritual life.

We must remember that, in earlier centuries, theologians supposed that the Book of Genesis (verses 1-3) is a single narrative of creation, including two episodes. The first episode narrates how creation came into being. The second narrative narrates how this perfect creation became defective (Spangenberg, 2013). However, today scholars of the Old Testament have approved that (the Book of Genesis, verses 1-3) comprises of two different sections called the P (for Priestly author) and the J (for Yahwistic) narratives, and none of them is a historical account of what happened at the beginning of creation (Westermann, 1972).

The first narrative (the Book of Genesis, 1:1-2:4a) tells how the whole universe was created in six days. This creation story probably originated in Babylonia during the exile (586-539 BCE) and is assigned to the P-document (Bandstra, 1995).

The second story of creation (Gen 2:4b-3:24), which forms part of the J-document, explains why humans possess divine knowledge but not divine life. They can distinguish between good and bad, but they

do not live forever. Anyway, nothing in the narrative suggests that he was created to be immortal (physically) (Spangenberg, 2013).

So unlike the claim of Augustine (354-430), in the Book of Genesis (2:4b-3:24) is not an account about death as punishment because the Hebrew word for 'sin' is not used anywhere in the narrative (Tucker, 1978; Primavesi, 2000); and none of the other biblical books ever referred to this story to explain the origin of sin and mortality of the human being. The ancient Israelites thought that death was a typical event in life. Death is only 'unnatural' when it arrives before a person has lived a whole life (Smelik, 2003; Alexander, 2008; Spangenberg, 2013).

Therefore, as *Spangenberg* also emphasizes, the conviction that death could be linked to the events narrated in Genesis (2-3) is non-existent in the Tanakh (Smelik, 2003; Alexander, 2008; Spangenberg, 2013). Moreover, even if we accept the mortality for Adam, there is a statement in Torah that it must not be transmissible to all of his descendants. The Torah says:

"The fathers shall not be put to death for the children; neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his sin." (Deut 24:16)

Therefore as Ross argues, Adam's spiritual death occurred immediately when he ate the Forbidden Fruit, but it is wrong to conclude that Adam's physical death did not inevitably result (Ross, 1994). Therefore:

1- Adam died spiritually in the Garden but remained alive physically when he disobeyed (Gurney, 2001).

2- Adam died physically many years after the Fall and expulsion from the Garden (Gurney, 2001).

In Christian theology, some accounts of Paul in his epistles



that refer to the story of Genesis consider human death as the result of Adam's sin, while there are no records and demonstrations by Jesus in the New Testament in this regard. Historically, since the 4th century, Christian theologians have linked the account of Genesis (2-3) with Paul's letter to Romans (5:12), which states that: "It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervaded the whole human race since all have sinned.").

As Spangenberg writes, Paul did not write a philosophical or theological treatise. Instead, He proposed a model to convince the readers of his epistle that they had been released from the death penalty (Rom, 5).<sup>1</sup> Anyway, Paul's explanation of this matter in his letter made an enormous impact on Augustine and eventually Western Christianity (Pagels, 1994).

As one of the Latin fathers of the Church and one of the most prominent Christian scholars in the history of Christianity, St. Augustine expounded the idea of Original Sin and death. He argued that without Adam's sin, there would be no death. Such a view became the predominant view in Christianity (Augustinus-Lexikon; Spangenberg, 2013).

Therefore, Adam's sin did not transform nature. Adam's sin did not transform nature. This understanding of the story of Genesis (2-3) represents Augustine's approaches rather than Paul's. Humans are not

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<sup>1</sup>. It is important to remember that when Augustine (354-430) became the Bishop of Hippo (395), Christianity was already the official religion of the Roman Empire, a development to which the Emperors Constantine (275-337) and Theodosius (346-395) contributed most. Constantine declared Christianity as the official religion of the Empire and Theodosius made it the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. Both Emperors contributed to the development of creeds to establish unity amongst Christians and to keep the empire safe (Spangenberg, 2013).

as being 'rooted' in Adam to Paul, nor does he believe that they are consequently condemned to physical death, as Augustine maintains in his *Enchiridion* (Van Bavel, 2008).

Pelagius repudiated the idea that 'death is a consequence of Adam's disobedience' (Knowles, 2004) and that there was a universal and permanent change in nature' after the Fall (Pagels, 1994). As Fredriksen argues, Augustine had almost no knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, so he had read only Latin translations of the Bible (Fredriksen, 2012). The Roman 5 Latin translation:12d ('*in whom* all sinned, not '*since* all have sinned' in the representation of the Greek) encouraged him to develop his Adam's progeny idea of being 'rooted' in him and thus co-condemned by God (Spangenberg, 2013). According to Pelagius' argument, his orthodox convictions are declared by two councils of bishops in Palestine.

So, the Catholic Church accepted Augustine's doctrine, and the Protestant reformers embraced his views without any serious criticism. So, his theological view was embedded as Christian principles (Pelikan, 2003). Nevertheless, there was a radical change by the change in paradigm in the Biblical studies to the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century (Noll, 1991; Saebø, 1995). By scientific improvements in recent decades, life and death have been discussed and considered more important. So as some research indicates, St. Augustine's opinion on death could no longer be defensible. However, conservative theologians and church members are still reluctant to acknowledge it (Bowler, 2007). As Spangenberg emphasizes, a change in traditional Christian theology seems to presuppose a meaningful dialogue between religion and science (Spangenberg, 2013). In this regard, Loader, a scholar in ecology and religion, argued that death is a prerequisite for new life; so, life on earth cannot evolve without death (Spangenberg, 2013).

Primavesi was the first theologian who argued that we could never claim that our theological doctrines and convictions are eternally valid (Primavesi, 2000). Thus, abandoning Paul's and Augustine's accounts on sin and death is what theologians should entertain and step into formulating new concepts on death according to our contemporary knowledge (Spangenberg, 2013).

Moreover, as we know, Jesus's complete obedience to God did not bring him eternal physical life. Adam's death could not influence human death in general. Therefore, the Old Testament has theologically not implied the physical immortality of Adam before eating from the forbidden fruit, although there is an agreement on his spiritual death immediately after his disobedience.

In Christianity, while there are no implications by Jesus in the New Testament on humanity's death due to Adam's sin, some reinterpretations of Paul about genesis (2-3) refer to it. Although St. Agustin's ideas became the dominant doctrine in Western Christianity, by the end of the 19th century, a paradigm shift in biblical studies put the idea that death is linked to Adam's sin under severe criticism (Spangenberg, 2013). In this regard, several explanations discuss that Adam's Sin caused his spiritual death like many other sins in the bible that would lead to death.

### **The Physical Life in Quran**

In Islamic teachings, God first created Adam from the soil. A few verses of the Holy Quran have discussed human creation via blowing God's spirit in the material body, including:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from clay. When I finished it (in due proportion) and breathed

into him of My spirit, fall down in prostrate before him."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, by blowing God's Spirit into the human body, physical life and material life were granted to Adam.

### **The Concept of Spiritual Death in the Quran**

Like other Abrahamic faiths, Islam believes that God shall grant every faithful man and woman who believes and does good deeds a real pure life. This spiritual life is called *Tayyibah* life in Quran. God, who is Omnipresent, gives any person a degree of spiritual life according to how well they do; a life that only faithful and pure people will enjoy. Also, sins are actions done against God's will and originate from ignorance, arrogance, and persistence in disobeying God. So, they can cause a spiritual death in this world and hereafter.

The main aim of legislation in Islam is closeness to Allah (SWT), which is obtained through piety and self-purification. The ultimate goal of sending prophets and holy books is the purification and evolution of man.<sup>2</sup>

Allah (SWT) awards the greater spirituality to those who attend His worship:

Whoever works righteousness, whether man or woman and has Faith, verily, We will give them a new life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions (Holy Quran, An-Nahl, 97). In this verse, two

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١. "اذ قال ربك للملكة اني خالقت بشرا من طين. فاذا سويته و نفخت فيه من روحي فقعوا له ساجدين"  
( Holy Quran, Sad, 71-72)

٢. "It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error" (Holy Quran, al-Jumu'a, 2)

conditions of achieving this life are expressed: Faith and good deeds

God, who is Omnipresent, gives any person a degree of spiritual life according to how well they do in obeying Him, a life that only faithful and pure people will enjoy. Also, spiritual life is considered a consequential result in response to the Prophet's word:

“O ye who believe! give your response to Allah and His apostle when He called you to that which will give you life.”<sup>1</sup>

Quran has emphasized the importance of living a faithful life (the spiritual life) and has come to warn and fear those who have the benefit of real life:

“...that it may give admonition to any (who are) alive and that the charge may be proved against those who reject (Truth).”<sup>2</sup>

In another verse, Allah gives faithful people light for progression:

"Is who was dead and whom we have revived and given a light, which can help him to walk among people, to be compared to him who blunders about in darkness from which he will never emerge? As such, what the unbelievers have done appears decorated to them." <sup>3</sup>

In this verse, God describes faithful people as alive with (spiritual) light. In this respect, although a pagan person is alive, he is regarded as dead (spiritually) and out of (spiritual) light, and thus, obviously, a believer would enjoy a proper life while a pagan would not have a chance to enjoy it.

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١. "مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً..." (Holy Quran, An-nahl, 97)

٢. "لينذر من كان حيا و يحق القول على الكافرين." (Holy Quran, Ya-Sin, 70)

٣. "أومن كان ميتا فأحييناه و جعلنا له نورا يمشي به فى الناس كمن مثله فى الظلمات ليس بخارج منها" (Al-An'am, 122)

## Is Human Death a Consequence of Adam's Sin in the Quran?

Despite some similarities on the general theme and structure of the creation story of Adam and Eve in the Quran and Torah, they differ in some essential points and conclusions such as:

1-According to Quran, Adam (Arabic: آدم) is honored with being both the first human being and the first prophet (Yousuf, 1981; Holy Quran, Ali 'Imran, 33).<sup>١</sup>

2- Basically, Islamic scholars believe that this command of God (in forbidding Adam from eating out of the Forbidden Fruit) was a "guidance prohibition," not "*Mowlavi* prohibition."<sup>٢</sup> So, it was not considered a sin for Adam.

3-The Quran says that God commanded that Adam and Eve not eat from one tree in heaven, but *Iblis* enticed them to taste it (Thorp, 1982). Anyway, they both repented, and God accepted it (Holy Quran, Taha, 121; Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, 37).

4- God had already decided that humanity would be living on earth, even before the creation of Adam:

A. Islamic teachings do not ascribe human's life on earth as a punishment, instead of as part of God's primary plan for humans, because God says to the angels in the Quran (Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, 30 - 33),

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١. "Allah did choose Adam and Noah the family of Abraham and the family of Imran above all people."

”إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ”

٢. There are two kinds of commands: "Mowlavi" and "guidance". *Mowlavi* order or prohibition is about unlawful activities that has been promised to hell for it such as murder or leaving the obligatory religious duties, but "guidance" is the advice that will bring along peace and tranquility (Tabatabaei, 1995).

"Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth."<sup>1</sup>

C. God Created humankind out of clay from the earth, so he must return to it:

"From the (earth) did We create you and into it shall We return you and from it shall We bring you out once again."<sup>2</sup>

D. Basically, the discussion about the tree of life has not come in the Quran like Torah. Nevertheless, the tree of life and immortality are temptations of Satan:

"But Satan whispered evil to him: he said, "O Adam! shall I lead thee to Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?"<sup>3</sup>

"... he said: "Your Lord forbade you from this tree only lest ye should become angels or become of the immortals."<sup>4</sup>

Satan pretends that eating from the Forbidden Tree causes:

1. Obtaining the Tree of Eternity or becoming of the immortals.

This issue shows that it was clear that Adam was a mortal being in the first place, even before eating from the Tree.

2. The kingdom that never decays;
3. Becoming angels.

However, Satan's promises proved to be false:

"So by deceit, he brought about their fall."<sup>5</sup>

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١. " وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً .

٢. "منها خلقناكم و فيها نعبدكم و منها نخرجكم تارة أخرى" (Holy Quran, Taha, 55).

٣. "فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَ مَلَكَ لَا يَبْلَى" (Holy Quran, Taha, 120).

٤. "وَقَالَ مَا تَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَئِينَ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ" (Holy Quran, al-A'raf, 20).

٥. "فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُورٍ" (Holy Quran, Al-A'raf, 22).

E. In addition, when Satan disobeyed in prostration before Adam and God expelled him, he requested: "He said: "give me respite till the day they are raised." (Holy Quran, al-A'raf, 14)

The phrase "till the day they are raised" displays the clear strategy and requirement of living and death of a man on the earth and the certainty of the day of rising.

In a nutshell, according to the holy Quran, Adam and Eve repented, and through God's acceptance, they were cleansed of the sin<sup>1</sup> Anyway, everyone is responsible only for their sins, and there is no responsibility on the shoulders of his progeny.<sup>2</sup> Even none of the Islamic scholars have implied the spiritual death for Adam and Eve in this event.

### **Conclusion**

As discussed, the story of Adam and Eve and their sin of eating from the Forbidden Tree are mentioned in Torah, Quran, and Bible. There is some agreement among these holy texts, which is mentioned in Islam, Christian, and Judaism. These significant similarities are as follows:

1. there exist two kinds of lives for humans: physical and spiritual;
2. God has given a physical life to humans by blowing onto his spirit;

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\. "Then Adam received Words (of forgiveness) from his Lord, and He accepted his repentance. Verily, He is the One Who repeatedly accepts repentance, the Most Merciful." (Holy Quran, Al-Baqarah, 37)

Ÿ "... No person earns any (sin) except against himself (only), and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another..." (6:164) Also Quran states: "No one laden with burdens can bear another's burden. And We never punish (people) until We have sent (to them) a Messenger (to give warning)." (17:15)



3. Faith and good deeds would cause spiritual life;
5. Sins cause human spiritual death.

Despite such similarities in these three holy books, they differ in some critical points—one of these significant differences in the consequences of Adam's sin. Traditional views, particularly some accounts of Paul in the New Testament that Augustine later exaggerated, imply that the human's death is considered the direct consequence of Adam's sin. This doctrine has been developed as one of the fundamental assumptions in Christian theology. However, nowhere in Torah has explicitly stated that human physical death results from Adam's Original Sin. Also, none of the Prophets before Jesus were known to believe in this concept. Instead, as a direct consequence of human sin, spiritual death can be a consequence of Adam's sin like other human's sins. Quran has never stated anything about Adam and his progeny's physical and spiritual death. Instead, Quran states that merciful God forgives his fault, and God will never punish people for the sins of others, and basically, sin is not hereditary.

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