

## Extinction as Divine Design: Qur’anic Perspectives on the Disappearance of Living Beings and Natural Balance

### Article

### Abstract

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Extinction is commonly perceived as a catastrophic end in the history of life on Earth. However, the Qur’an presents a broader theological and cosmological framework in which destruction, disappearance, and renewal operate as integral components of divine order (*sunnatullah*). This article explores the concept of extinction from a Qur’anic perspective and examines its resonance with scientific understandings of mass extinction in Earth sciences. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, this study utilizes thematic Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsir mawdu’i*) alongside insights from geology, paleontology, and environmental science. The analysis reveals that the Qur’an consistently frames the disappearance of living beings, through natural disasters, environmental transformations, and historical annihilation of past communities, as part of a purposeful process aimed at maintaining balance, preparing the Earth, and sustaining life for subsequent generations. Scientific accounts of mass extinction events similarly demonstrate that large-scale biological losses often precede ecological renewal and increased biodiversity. By placing Qur’anic narratives in dialogue with scientific explanations, this study argues that extinction should not be understood merely as destruction, but as a divinely governed mechanism of renewal and equilibrium. This integrative perspective contributes to contemporary Qur’an–science discourse and offers a theological foundation for ecological awareness, emphasizing human responsibility as *khalifah* in preserving the balance of the Earth.

Keywords: Extinction; Qur’anic Perspective; *Sunnatullah*; Earth Sciences; Ecology; Qur’an and Science.

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## INTRODUCTION

Extinction is an inevitable reality. “And We have placed within it means of living for you and for those for whom you are not providers” (Qur'an, and all forms of life will perish. The Qur'an affirms this ultimate reality:

“Everything that exists on the earth will perish, but the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honor, will remain” (Qur'an, 55:27).

The Qur'an further explains that destruction does not occur arbitrarily but unfolds through divinely ordained mechanisms repeatedly mentioned across various chapters. Verses such as al-A'rāf (7:137), al-Isrā' (17:16), al-Furqān (25:36), ash-Shu'arā' (26:172), an-Naml (27:51), aṣ-Ṣāffāt (37:136), al-Aḥqāf (46:25), and Muḥammad (47:10) recount the annihilation of earlier communities who rebelled against divine commands. These destructions occurred through natural phenomena, including violent winds that struck the people of 'Ād, showers of stones and earthquakes that destroyed the people of Sodom, the great flood that annihilated the people of Prophet Noah and the people of Saba', and lightning that struck the people of Madyan. Through these narratives, the Qur'an warns humanity that destruction is both historical and moral in nature.

From a scientific perspective, the annihilation of living beings on Earth has indeed occurred repeatedly throughout geological history, long before the emergence of humankind (Muchlis, 2012). These extinction events unfolded through mechanisms that closely resemble those described in the Qur'an, particularly in the form of natural disasters. While such events did not eliminate all life entirely, each episode resulted in the extinction of more than half of existing species, and in some cases, over 90 percent of life forms vanished. From the standpoint of geology, these occurrences are classified as natural geological phenomena, such as volcanism, earthquakes (Qur'an, 99:1–6), massive floods or ocean overflows (Qur'an, 82:3), and meteor impacts (Qur'an, 82:2). Consequently, the extinction of living beings constitutes an integral part of Earth's history and, ultimately, a manifestation of divine will that unfolds with certainty (Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Kementrian, 2012).

One striking aspect of the Qur'anic narrative is its limited reference to forms of life that differ fundamentally from those currently inhabiting the Earth, apart from metaphysical beings such as angels, jinn, and devils. Long before human existence, countless life forms inhabited the Earth, many of which differed significantly from present-day species and lived in succession over vast spans of time. Evidence of these ancient life forms is abundantly preserved in the fossil record scattered across the globe. Fossilized bones of animals and remnants of ancient plants testify that the Earth was once inhabited by giant prehistoric organisms that no longer exist, such as dinosaurs, large reptiles, and saber-toothed predators. Similarly, fossilized remains of microscopic organisms—including bacteria, plankton, pollen, and spores—embedded in sedimentary rock reveal a radically different prehistoric Earth surface. These remnants provide compelling evidence that extinct organisms once thrived on Earth and that ancient environmental conditions differed markedly, with vast regions submerged underwater or dominated by giant fern forests (Sumartono, 2019).

Divine messages, therefore, are conveyed not only through revealed scripture but also

through empirical signs embedded in the natural world. For believers, fossilized remains preserved within Earth's strata constitute tangible evidence of God's power manifested in the distant past. The Qur'an declares:

“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth. Is it not sufficient that your Lord is Witness over all things?” (Qur'an, 41:53).

This study examines how the Qur'an addresses the extinction of living beings, how life emerges, grows, and develops on Earth, and how God subsequently annihilates and replaces it with forms deemed more suitable. It also explores the benefits humanity derives from the existence of earlier life forms and concludes by reflecting on the lessons and wisdom that can be drawn from these historical processes of emergence and extinction.

From the perspective of Earth sciences, the emergence and extinction of living organisms prior to human existence can be reconstructed through fossil remains preserved within geological layers. In terms of magnitude, prehistoric extinction events are relatively insignificant when compared to the final cosmic destruction associated with the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, the scale and duration of ancient extinction processes far exceed the destruction experienced by earlier rebellious communities described in the Qur'an. Geological history indicates that these ancient extinctions unfolded over prolonged periods and produced consequences of extraordinary magnitude.

Initially, Earth's history was reconstructed through the study of stratified rock layers and the fossils embedded within them. The relative age of Earth was estimated through stratigraphic principles based on fossil distribution, while more precise dating became possible following the development of radiometric dating techniques that measure radioactive decay ratios. Through global correlation of stratigraphic layers, Earth's geological timeline was standardized and divided into distinct temporal segments (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.).

Geological history is commonly divided into four major eons: the Hadean (approximately 4.5–4 billion years ago), the Archean (4–2.5 billion years ago), the Proterozoic (2.5–0.5 billion years ago), and the Phanerozoic (from approximately 500 million years ago to the present). Each eon is further subdivided into eras, periods, and epochs. Significantly, the Qur'an alludes to a four-stage process in the preparation of the Earth:

“He placed firm mountains upon it, blessed it, and apportioned its sustenance in four periods, equally for those who seek” (Qur'an, 41:10).

In this verse, God explicitly states that the Earth was created and provisioned over “four days.” The term *ayyām* (plural of *yaum*) does not necessarily denote a literal day but may signify an extended period or epoch. In common usage, *yaum* refers to a day marked by daylight, yet its plural form can denote long durations of time. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934) equates *yaum* with the English terms age or eon, while the sixteenth-century exegete Abū as-Su'ūd interprets it as an event or phase. Consequently, *ayyām* in this context is more accurately understood as stages or epochs rather than literal days (Taufiq & Salman, 2024).

The four geological eons represent successive stages in Earth's preparation until it became habitable, with stable climate conditions, abundant resources, and accessible energy. Extinction events, consistently followed by renewal, appear to function as part of a grand

divine scenario preparing the Earth for humankind to fulfill its role as khalīfah (vicegerent). During the Quaternary Period, Earth attained its present climatic balance, with atmospheric oxygen and nitrogen levels suitable for life. Biodiversity flourished, providing food, medicine, and resources for human civilization. Fossil fuels, including petroleum formed from plankton and microorganisms during the Proterozoic Eon and coal formed from giant plants during the Triassic and Jurassic periods, became abundantly available.

These four geological eons thus represent stages toward the perfection of human life. Transitions between eons, and between eras, periods, and epochs, occurred through extinction mechanisms. Such processes can be interpreted as pathways toward perfection rather than mere destruction (Al-Qur'an, n.d.). The Qur'an further emphasizes that all necessities of human life, food, medicine, energy, and climate, are divinely provided, not human creations:

“And We have placed within it means of living for you and for those for whom you are not providers” (Qur'an, 15:20).

#### **METHOD** (Gill Sans MT, 12 pt, 1.5 spacing | APA 7th Edition)

This study employs a qualitative library-based research design to examine extinction as a theological and scientific concept within the Qur'anic worldview. Through this synthesis, extinction is interpreted as a meaningful process of destruction and renewal that reflects divine wisdom and reinforces human responsibility as *khalīfah* in maintaining balance on Earth'anic verses related to destruction, extinction, Earth's formation, and divine provision, including Qur'an 55:27; 7:137; 17:16; 25:36; 26:172; 27:51; 37:136; 46:25; 47:10; 41:10; and 15:20. Secondary data are drawn from Qur'anic thematic studies and scholarly discussions that explore the relationship between revelation and scientific perspectives on natural history (Muchlis, 2012; Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Kementrian, 2012; Sumartono, 2019; Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.).

The analytical framework of this research is based on thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawdū'ī*). Relevant Qur'anic verses are first identified and grouped according to themes of extinction, natural destruction, renewal, and Earth's preparation. Each verse is then interpreted contextually to uncover its theological meaning and ethical implications. Particular attention is given to semantic analysis of key Qur'anic terms, such as *yaum* and *ayyām*, which are understood not as literal days but as extended periods or stages, in line with classical exegetical interpretations (Ali, 1934, as cited in Taufiqy & Salman, 2024). This thematic approach enables a holistic understanding of extinction as part of divine order (*sunnatullah*) rather than as isolated or random events.

To integrate Qur'anic insights with scientific perspectives, the study places thematic findings in dialogue with established concepts from Earth sciences, including fossil evidence, geological stratification, radiometric dating, and geological periodization. This integration does not seek to equate Qur'anic verses with specific scientific theories or to use science as a tool for scriptural validation. Instead, it adopts a non-apologetic and complementary approach in which revelation provides a metaphysical and ethical framework, while science explains the mechanisms of extinction and renewal in Earth's history. Through this synthesis, extinction is

interpreted as a meaningful process of destruction and renewal that reflects divine wisdom and reinforces human responsibility as *khalīfah* in maintaining balance on Earth.

## RESULTS

The results of this study demonstrate that extinction in the Qur'anic framework is consistently presented as a structured and purposeful phenomenon rather than as a random or chaotic event. Qur'anic affirmations regarding divine provision (Qur'an 15:20) reinforce the finding that extinction functions indirectly to sustain subsequent life, including human civilization (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an 7:137; 17:16; 25:36; 26:172; 27:51). These mechanisms parallel large-scale natural processes recognized in Earth sciences, indicating that extinction operates within an orderly cosmic system governed by divine decree.

The findings further show that extinction in the Qur'an is closely linked to historical narratives of earlier communities. These narratives emphasize that annihilation unfolds gradually and contextually, often following prolonged periods of moral and social deviation. At the same time, the Qur'an does not portray extinction as the total elimination of life, but rather as selective destruction that allows continuity and renewal. This pattern aligns with scientific accounts of mass extinction events, in which significant proportions of life disappeared while other forms survived and later diversified (Muchlis, 2012).

Another important result concerns the Qur'anic concept of time in relation to Earth's formation. The reference to Earth being prepared in "four periods" (*ayyām*) (Qur'an 41:10) indicates a non-literal understanding of time. The term *ayyām* is shown to denote extended stages or phases rather than ordinary days, corresponding conceptually to geological epochs and long-term Earth processes (Ali, 1934, as cited in Taufiqy & Salman, 2024). This temporal framing supports the interpretation of extinction as part of gradual Earth preparation rather than abrupt or meaningless destruction.

Finally, the results indicate that extinction plays a preparatory role in making Earth habitable for human life. Geological transformations following extinction events contributed to the formation of stable climates, biodiversity, and natural resources essential for human survival. Qur'anic affirmations regarding divine provision (Qur'an 15:20) reinforce the finding that extinction functions indirectly to sustain subsequent life, including human civilization (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support and extend existing discussions within Qur'an–science scholarship by demonstrating that extinction is embedded within a coherent theological and cosmological framework. Unlike approaches that treat extinction solely as divine punishment or as a purely scientific phenomenon, this study shows that the Qur'an presents extinction as a manifestation of *sunnatullah*, operating through natural laws that are observable and consistent across time. This perspective aligns with thematic Qur'anic interpretations that emphasize balance (*mīzān*) and divine wisdom in natural processes (Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Kementrian Agama RI, 2012).

From the standpoint of Earth sciences, the findings resonate with established geological

theories regarding mass extinction and ecological renewal. Scientific studies have long demonstrated that extinction events, although destructive, often precede phases of environmental stabilization and biodiversity expansion. When viewed through a Qur'anic lens, such processes acquire ethical and metaphysical dimensions, transforming extinction from mere biological loss into a stage within divine governance of creation. This integrative reading avoids the pitfalls of scientific apologetics by maintaining epistemological boundaries between revelation and empirical science.

The interpretation of *ayyām* as extended temporal stages provides an important theoretical bridge between Qur'anic cosmology and geological time. Classical exegetical views that understand *yaum* as an "age" or "phase" (Ali, 1934, as cited in Taufiq & Salman, 2024) allow Qur'anic discourse to engage meaningfully with modern understandings of Earth history without requiring literal chronological alignment. This reinforces contemporary scholarly arguments that the Qur'an communicates cosmological truths in a conceptual rather than technical-scientific language.

The discussion also highlights the ethical implications of extinction narratives for contemporary environmental concerns. While extinction as *sunnatullah* is divinely ordained, the Qur'an distinguishes between natural destruction and human-induced corruption (*fasād*) (Qur'an 30:41). This distinction underscores human responsibility as *khalīfah* to preserve ecological balance rather than exacerbate destruction. Consequently, the findings contribute to ecological theology by offering a normative framework that integrates scientific awareness with moral accountability, extending beyond descriptive analysis toward practical relevance.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that extinction, as presented in the Qur'an and understood through Earth sciences, is neither random nor meaningless but constitutes a purposeful process governed by divine order (*sunnatullah*). Qur'anic narratives consistently depict extinction as occurring through natural mechanisms and within structured temporal stages, emphasizing continuity and renewal rather than absolute annihilation. Scientific evidence of mass extinction events supports this understanding by demonstrating that destruction is often followed by ecological transformation and the emergence of new life systems.

The integration of thematic Qur'anic exegesis with geological perspectives contributes to Qur'an–science discourse by offering a non-apologetic and conceptually coherent interpretation of extinction. This approach preserves the epistemological integrity of both revelation and science while highlighting their complementary roles in explaining Earth's history. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on textual and conceptual analysis and does not incorporate empirical scientific data or comparative quantitative studies.

Future research may expand this inquiry by engaging more extensively with contemporary environmental ethics, climate studies, and biodiversity research to further explore the implications of Qur'anic ecological thought. Such studies could strengthen the contribution of Islamic theology to global discussions on sustainability and environmental responsibility, reinforcing the role of humanity as *khalīfah* entrusted with maintaining balance on Earth.

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