

Seven Heavens and Countless Worlds: An Interdisciplinary Commentary on Qur'an 65:12

Introduction

Qur'an 65:12 states: *"It is Allah Who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. His command descends between them..."* ¹. Traditionally, Muslim exegetes (mufasssīrūn) understood the **"seven heavens"** in this verse as seven distinct layers or realms of the cosmos created by God. In this commentary, however, we explore a **metaphorical** reading of "seven" – not as a precise number, but as a symbol for innumerable celestial realms. This perspective suggests that the Qur'an subtly alludes to the **vastness of the universe**, with "seven heavens" representing a multitude of heavens or worlds beyond our own. We will support this interpretation by examining classical and modern **tafsīr** (Qur'anic exegesis) on the phrase "seven heavens," by referencing the Qur'anic notion of an **expanding universe** (cf. Qur'an 51:47), and by integrating contemporary scientific findings on **exoplanets**, Earth-like planets in habitable zones, and theories regarding **extraterrestrial life**. Through an interdisciplinary lens spanning theology, philosophy, and astrophysics, we consider how Qur'an 65:12 can be understood as an invitation to contemplate a universe filled with countless worlds, with profound implications for humanity's self-perception and Islamic cosmology.

Classical Tafsīr: The "Seven Heavens" in Tradition

Classical Islamic scholarship generally took the **"seven heavens"** of Qur'an 65:12 at face value as **seven literal heavens** arranged in an ordered structure above the earth. Qur'anic commentators like **Al-Qurtubi** (d. 1273) report that the majority view among earlier scholars was that the heavens consist of seven vast **layers** or concentric realms one above the other ². Likewise, the verse's phrase "of the earth the like thereof" was interpreted to mean that Allah created **seven earths** corresponding to the seven heavens ². Many classical authorities envisioned the seven earths as stacked layers or worlds beneath our own, **"one above another"**, separated by great distances – "between each two earths there is a distance like that between heaven and earth," as one opinion held ². Another view (attributed to al-Dahhāk) suggested the seven earths are contiguous layers with no gaps ³, though Qurtubi and others favored the former idea of spaced-apart realms because it was thought to be supported by early Islamic reports. In essence, the prevailing pre-modern understanding was a **tiered universe** with seven heavens above and (possibly) seven earths below, all part of Allah's ordered creation.

This literal cosmology was often accompanied by descriptive narrations. For example, a hadith from **Ibn Mas'ūd** taught that the vertical distance between each heaven is 500 years' journey ⁴. Furthermore, classical scholars asserted that each heaven has its **inhabitants** – typically angels – based on Islamic tradition ⁵. By contrast, little was known or said about the supposed other earths. **"We know from the Sunnah that each heaven has its inhabitants, but there is nothing that tells us about the earths other than the one in which we live,"** notes one authoritative summary ⁵. In practice, scholars cautioned against speculating too much about these seven earths or the detailed mechanics of the heavens, as such matters belong to the unseen. The **Qur'an** itself gives minimal detail, and **hadith** references to the seven

earths are scarce and of debatable authenticity ⁶ ⁵. Thus, the classical tafsīr approach was to **affirm the existence** of seven heavens (and seven earths) as a sign of Allah's power, while **"not overstepping the mark"** by indulging in descriptions not grounded in scripture ⁵. The early exegetes stressed the *theological message* of 65:12 over cosmographical specifics: the verse shows that **God's command and knowledge pervade every level of the universe**, *"not even the weight of an atom, in the highest heaven or the lowest earth, is beyond His power and knowledge"* ⁷. In other words, whether one envisions a literal seven-layered cosmos or not, the point is that **Allah's omnipotence and omniscience extend throughout all creation**.

It is worth noting that some classical commentators rejected forced reinterpretations that downplayed the cosmic scope of **"seven heavens"**. *Tafsīr* works uniformly dismissed the suggestion that "seven earths" merely refers to seven regions or continents of *this* Earth. For instance, **Ibn Kathīr** (d. 1373) labeled the "seven continents" explanation **"implausible"** and contradictory to the Qur'an's plain words ⁸. To Ibn Kathīr, the verse clearly speaks of multiple created earths, not just our one planet's geography ⁸. This insistence indicates that classical scholars saw the **cosmic plurality** in the verse as intentional, even if they confessed human ignorance of its details. In line with the early Muslim ethos, they would "leave unexplained what Allah left unexplained" ⁹, focusing instead on the awe-inspiring implication that **creation is far more extensive than humans can observe**. The classical view, then, treated "seven" as a definite number of cosmic realms, emphasizing God's mastery over a layered universe – a universe vast and intricate, yet comprehensively under divine authority.

Metaphorical Interpretations: "Seven" as Indefinite Multiplicity

While the mainstream historical view treated the number **seven** in "seven heavens" literally, Islamic scholarship has also long recognized that the Qur'an (and Arabic language in general) sometimes employs certain numbers **symbolically**. In Arabic rhetoric, **"seven"** (as well as "seventy") can serve as a figure of speech connoting **multitude or completeness** rather than a precise count ¹⁰. The Qur'an itself uses the number seven in contexts where a strictly literal interpretation is not intended. For example, Luqmān 31:27 says that if all the seas turned to ink, supplemented by **"seven more seas,"** they would still not suffice to write the words of God – here "seven seas" signifies **an abundance** (all the oceans), not exactly seven bodies of water. Similarly, the Qur'an (in al-Tawbah 9:80) tells the Prophet that even if he begged forgiveness for certain people **"seventy times,"** Allah would not forgive them – the phrase "seventy times" simply means **"no matter how many times"** (a large number) ¹⁰. These examples illustrate a Semitic idiomatic usage in which *seven* (or *seventy*) amplifies the magnitude or innumerability of something.

By this logic, **"seven heavens"** can be understood as a **literary trope for "numerous heavens"** – an expansive, *unquantified* plurality of heavenly realms. Some commentators, classical and modern, have indeed endorsed this view. They note that the Qur'an's persistent mention of seven heavens is less about delimiting quantity and more about evoking the **fullness of the cosmos** ¹⁰. On this reading, the number seven indicates **"layers upon layers"** or **manifold levels** of sky and space, ultimately pointing to *all* the heavens above. A modern analysis succinctly states: *"the Quran sometimes uses the number 'seven', like 'seventy', to connote 'numerous' or 'innumerable'... Thus 'seven Heavens' may generally mean numerous or innumerable celestial systems."* ¹⁰. In other words, the phrase is **qualitative**, not quantitative – describing the heavens as an immensely abundant reality far beyond what we can count or imagine.

Modern Quranic interpreters have explored such non-literal understandings especially in light of scientific discoveries. Some 20th-century scholars argued that the Qur'an's cosmological terms are **flexible** and not

tied to medieval astronomy. For instance, the respected Pakistani exegete **Javed Ahmad Ghamidi** notes that many earlier *mufasssīrūn* offered different theories: some linked the seven heavens to the **seven classical planets** known in antiquity, or to seven layers of Earth's atmosphere, while others (more persuasively) took it as an idiom for **"a huge, infinite or large number"** ¹¹. The **metaphorical approach** has the advantage of accommodating the **ever-growing scale** of the universe revealed by modern science. It suggests that when the Qur'an says *"Allah created seven heavens,"* it is teaching that God created the **entire cosmos in all its multiplicity** – not limiting creation to only seven celestial strata. In this view, the *exact* number is less important than the underlying idea of **multilayered or innumerable expanses** of space.

Crucially, this perspective finds support within the Qur'an itself when read holistically. A key related verse is **Qur'an 51:47**, in which Allah says: *"We built the heaven with might, and indeed We are expanding it."* Classical commentators interpreted *"expanding"* (Arabic: *mūsi'ūn*) in various ways, one of which aligns strikingly with the modern understanding of an **expanding universe**. **Abul A'lā Maudūdī** (d. 1979) explains in his *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* that according to one interpretation, 51:47 means: *"This huge universe that We have created is not a finished work, but We are expanding it continuously, and new and ever new manifestations of Our creation are appearing in it every moment."* ¹². Here Maudūdī recognizes that the Qur'an portrays the creation of the heavens not as a static, completed event, but as an **ongoing, dynamic process** – an insight uncannily mirrored by 20th-century cosmology (the discovery that space itself is expanding). The Qur'anic depiction of the heavens being built and expanded underscores that *limitlessness* and *growth* are intrinsic to the cosmos. This lends credence to reading "seven heavens" as **open-ended**: the universe comprises *layer upon layer* of heavenly realms, continually unfolding by God's command. In sum, **metaphorical and modern tafsīr** perspectives allow "seven" to mean **"several" or "countless,"** which harmonizes the Qur'an's language with a universe of **inconceivable vastness** rather than confining it to a numerological figure.

An Expanding Universe and Qur'anic Allusions

It is noteworthy that the Qur'an contains verses that resonate strongly with modern cosmology's portrayal of a vast, expanding universe. As mentioned, **Qur'an 51:47** is often highlighted in this context. The verse says: *"And the heaven We built with power, and We are expanding (it)"*, using the Arabic term *mūsi'ūn* which can imply expanding or making vast. Classical scholars offered multiple nuances for this term – some took it to mean "We enrich it" or "We encompass it with Our power," but several, like **Maudūdī**, explicitly recognized the sense of **ongoing expansion** ¹². In an era long before the Big Bang theory, **Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī** had already mused that the creation of the heavens might be continuous, noting that God's creative act did not necessarily cease after the initial creation. Today, we know that space itself is stretching: distant galaxies are receding, and the observable universe has been growing for ~13.8 billion years since the Big Bang. The Qur'anic wording *"We are expanding it"* ¹² is thus remarkably apt – it captures in a succinct phrase what science would uncover centuries later about the **dynamic nature of the cosmos**. For believers, this alignment is not so much a scientific "prediction" as it is a sign of the Qur'an's *elastic language*, capable of revealing new depths of meaning as human knowledge progresses.

Another verse that bears on the discussion is **Qur'an 42:29**, which deals directly with the possibility of life beyond Earth. It reads: *"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the living creatures that He has dispersed throughout them; and He is able to gather them (all) whenever He wills."* This verse explicitly mentions **creatures (dabbah)** scattered in both the heavens and the earth. Classical lexicons define *dabbah* as living, crawling creatures – a term typically applied to animals or beings that move on a surface. Many Muslim scholars have pointed out that 42:29 **"could mean anything"** in terms of what those

creatures are ¹³. Some early commentators, uncomfortable with the idea of life in the heavens, argued that “*heavens and earth*” in this verse should be read as a merism (a figure of speech) for “**earth alone**”, suggesting that *dabbah* only refers to earthly animals (with “heavens” mentioned only to indicate the vastness of God’s dominion) ¹⁴. **However, others – including major translators like Yusuf Ali – have understood 42:29 in its plain sense: that God’s signs include whatever living beings He *may have spread* throughout the heavenly realms** ¹⁵. This is a striking notion: the Qur’an leaves open the **existence of extraterrestrial life** as one of Allah’s signs. The verse even alludes to a future gathering of these creatures if God wills, which tantalizingly suggests that if multiple worlds have life, ultimately they share the same divine origin and might be brought together by God’s plan.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (12th century) directly addressed this possibility. In his commentary on 42:29, Rāzī wrote: “*It is not far-fetched to say that Allah might have created in the heavens such types of creatures as move or walk (i.e. live and behave) like mankind on the earth.*” ¹⁶. This remarkable statement from a medieval theologian shows an openness to what we would today call **alien life**. Rāzī and others grounded such speculation in the Qur’anic worldview of a **populous cosmos**. After all, the Qur’an calls God “*Lord of the Worlds*” – in Arabic, *Rabb al-‘ālamīn* ¹⁷ – a title so important that it appears in the opening verse of the Fātiḥah (Q.1:2). The plural “**worlds**” (*‘ālamīn*) can be understood to mean “**all categories of creation**”, but it certainly implies a plurality rather than a single world. Medieval Muslim thinkers took this seriously. Below are two notable examples from early Islamic thought that envision **cosmic plurality**:

- **Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733 CE)** – a prominent early scholar – is reported to have said: “*Maybe you think that God created only this single world and no other humans besides you. No, by God, God created thousands and thousands of worlds and thousands and thousands of humankind.*” ¹⁸ This emphatic statement (from a 7th/8th-century figure) suggests not only multiple worlds, but even multiple species or races of intelligent beings akin to humans. It reflects an ancient Islamic conviction that **Allah’s creative scope is far beyond our own realm**.
- **Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE)** – one of the great theologian-philosophers of Islam – argued against the Aristotelian idea that the Earth is the unique center of the universe. Rāzī wrote that there exist “**a thousand thousand worlds (alf alfi ‘awālim) beyond this world**”, with each of those worlds “**bigger and more massive than this world**” and “**having the like of what this world has.**” ¹⁹ In saying “*a thousand thousand*,” Rāzī essentially posited **one million other worlds**, complete with analogous features (perhaps lands, creatures, even prophets). He explicitly cited the Qur’anic phrase “**Lord of the Worlds**” as evidence that multiple worlds are a theological reality ¹⁹. Rāzī’s view can be seen as a proto-“**multiverse**” concept in Islamic thought ²⁰, or at least a robust form of **cosmic pluralism**: he envisioned inhabited worlds *beyond* the known earthly realm, challenging the notion of Earth’s centrality long before modern science did.

These examples demonstrate that **cosmic plurality** has been contemplated within Islamic theology for centuries. Early Muslim scholars, without any telescopes or knowledge of other planets, could still imagine a cosmos replete with other worlds and other life forms. Their inspiration was the **Qur’ān’s own expansive language** – phrases like “seven heavens,” “Lord of the Worlds,” and verses like 42:29 – which encouraged believers not to view humanity and Earth as the sole focus of creation. Such classical insights provide a fascinating point of dialogue with **contemporary science**, which has now revealed just how many worlds exist “out there.”

Exoplanets and the Quest for Earth-Like Planets

Modern astronomical discoveries dramatically affirm the idea that we live in a universe of **countless worlds** – making the metaphorical interpretation of “seven heavens” even more compelling. In the last three decades, scientists have developed the ability to detect **exoplanets** (planets orbiting stars other than our Sun), and the results have revolutionized our understanding of the cosmos. Here are some key findings:

- **Thousands of Planets:** To date, over **5,000 exoplanets** have been discovered and confirmed, out of the billions likely present in our Milky Way galaxy ²¹. These planetary systems come in a great diversity of sizes and configurations, proving that planets are *commonplace* in the universe rather than exceptional. (Just in the 1990s, we hadn’t confirmed a single planet beyond our solar system – a testament to how rapidly knowledge has expanded ²².)
- **Earth-Like Worlds:** Many exoplanets are **rocky and Earth-sized**. Statistical extrapolations from NASA’s *Kepler* mission data suggest that roughly **1 in 5 Sun-like stars** may host an Earth-size planet in the star’s habitable zone (the region where temperatures could allow liquid water). This implies on the order of **~20 billion Earth-like planets** in our galaxy alone ²³. In other words, the basic ingredients for Earth-like conditions are abundantly scattered across the cosmos.
- **Habitable Zone Candidates:** As of the mid-2020s, astronomers have identified about **60** exoplanets that are considered *potentially habitable* – generally meaning they are Earth-sized (or slightly larger) and receive enough starlight to possibly sustain liquid water on their surfaces ²⁴. These include planets in nearby systems: for example, **Proxima Centauri b** (the closest exoplanet at 4.2 light years away) or several of the **TRAPPIST-1** system’s seven Earth-sized planets, **three** of which lie in the habitable zone of their star ²⁵. Such planets are prime targets in the search for life beyond our solar system.

The sheer number of worlds that science has unveiled is staggering. Where once “seven earths” sounded like a lot, we now know there are **thousands** of distinct planets just in our cosmic neighborhood, and potentially billions more waiting to be found. Importantly, these discoveries have shown that **Earth-like planets are not unique**. There are many planets of similar size and composition to Earth; some share key characteristics like temperate climates or the presence of water (inferred from atmospheric studies). While none of these planets has been confirmed to actually host life yet, they have transformed the theoretical question “Could there be other earths?” into a tangible reality: **other Earths very likely do exist** in the universe, even if we have yet to see a second “Blue Planet” with our own eyes.

Scientists worldwide are now focused on the next step: investigating these exoplanets for signs of **life**. A new field, **astrobiology**, bridges astronomy and biology to examine the potential for living organisms beyond Earth. Powerful telescopes and spectrographs are being used to analyze exoplanet atmospheres for **biosignatures** – for instance, detecting oxygen, ozone, methane, or other gases in combinations that might indicate biological activity. Researchers are also listening for **technosignatures** (like radio signals) as part of SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) programs. To date, no definitive evidence of even microbial extraterrestrial life has been found ²⁶. However, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence; our detection methods are still in their infancy. Given the vast number of planets, many scientists remain optimistic that life (in some form) will eventually be discovered elsewhere. Astronomer **Sara Seager** noted in 2013 that for the first time in human history, our technology “*has the reach to find life on other planets,*” estimating that signs of life might be detectable within a decade or two with advancing techniques ²³.

The scientific community entertains a wide spectrum of views about extraterrestrial life. On one end, the late **Carl Sagan** and others argued that with millions or billions of stars and planets, it would be extraordinary if *life* (especially intelligent life) had only arisen on Earth. Sagan famously speculated there could be up to **a million** advanced civilizations in the Milky Way. His colleague **Frank Drake**, formulator of the *Drake Equation*, made a more conservative guess of around **10,000** communicative civilizations in our galaxy ²⁷. Other scientists are far more skeptical – the proponents of the “Rare Earth” hypothesis argue that the specific conditions that made Earth hospitable (a stable star, protective Jupiter-like neighbors, a large moon, plate tectonics, etc.) might be extremely uncommon. For instance, astrophysicist **Ben Zuckerman** has suggested we *might be alone* at least in our galaxy ²⁸, and if life exists elsewhere it could be very primitive. So far, these debates remain largely **theoretical**. As one science writer put it, *“Estimates of life outside Earth are highly speculative. We don’t have any solid knowledge about a single alien microbe, a solitary spore, much less the hubcap from a passing alien starship.”* ²⁶ The **fact remains** that no clear evidence of life beyond Earth has turned up despite the tantalizing possibilities. Nevertheless, the discovery of myriad exoplanets (including many in habitable zones) has fundamentally changed our perspective: we now understand that **our planet is one among countless worlds**. This realization echoes the Qur’anic notion that God created **“the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them”** – encompassing an entire cosmos full of worlds, most of which were unknown to humans for most of history.

Cosmic Plurality and the Place of Humanity in the Universe

The convergence of Qur’anic insights with modern cosmology invites deep **philosophical and theological reflection**. If indeed the universe contains innumerable worlds – perhaps even innumerable **inhabited** worlds – what does that mean for us, the human race? How should we view our **place** in creation? Islamic theology provides a framework to approach these questions without panic or loss of faith. In Islam, human beings are considered the pinnacle of God’s *earthly* creation, endowed with intellect and the moral responsibility of vicegerency (*khilāfah*) on **our planet**. But the Qur’an does not state that humans are the only intelligent or spiritually accountable creatures in existence. In fact, it explicitly affirms other categories of sapient beings, such as **angels** (malā’ika) and **jinn** (spiritual entities), who populate other realms of the heavens and earth. A cosmos teeming with life, therefore, is not in conflict with Islamic belief – it simply adds further dimensions to the **“worlds”** that Allah rules over.

Islamic thought has always acknowledged a **cosmic plurality** in some form. The medieval scholars we cited (al-Bāqir, al-Rāzī, and others) were already comfortable with the idea that **Earth is not the only world**. This was centuries before Copernicus and Galileo dethroned Earth from the center of the physical universe. When modern astronomy showed that Earth orbits the Sun (one star among billions), and that even our Sun is just one star in a galaxy among billions of galaxies, the **scale** of creation expanded dramatically in human understanding. Yet nothing in the Qur’an needed revision, because the Qur’an had never claimed that cosmic space was small or that Earth was central. On the contrary, the scripture continuously draws attention to the **magnificence and vastness** of the heavens: *“the creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind”* (Q.40:57), and *“We did not create the heaven and earth and all between them in vain”* (Q.38:27). Such verses cultivate a sense of humility in believers. We are a **significant creation in terms of our moral role**, but we are not the *only* creation that matters. We inhabit one corner of an unimaginably broad cosmos. In Qur’anic cosmology, humanity’s story is **one thread in a much larger tapestry** of beings and worlds known fully only to God.

Being **one among many** should not be viewed as a demotion of humanity’s worth. Rather, it can be seen as an invitation to a greater **awe and responsibility**. The Qur’an teaches that *“Allah has power over all things,*

and Allah encompasses all things in His knowledge”²⁹ ³⁰ . This includes the far-flung galaxies and any living creatures within them. If and when we discover life elsewhere, Islamic theology would posit that those life forms are also part of Allah’s plan. They too would be “*signs*” (āyāt) of His creative might, just as the plants and animals on Earth are signs. Importantly, the existence of other life does not absolve humans of our duties; rather, it reminds us that **God’s kingdom is vast**, and our worship and stewardship of Earth are contributions to the harmony of a larger creation. As **Dr. Hasan al-Shafi’i** succinctly put it, “*If there is anything or nothing (out there), Islam is fine with it either way*”³¹ ³² – meaning, Islamic doctrine is agile enough to accommodate either scenario. Our ultimate destinies (Paradise or Hell) depend on our faith and deeds, not on whether aliens exist³³ ³² .

The possible discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence does raise interesting theological questions. Would such beings have their own prophets and revelations? Are they included in the Prophet Muhammad’s mission, or did God send them separate guidance suited to their nature? The Qur’an does not directly answer these questions, but it gives some clues. It says, “*And there never was a people without a warner having lived among them*” (Q.35:24) – which some might extend to mean **every “world”** of sentient beings gets divine guidance. The speculative report we mentioned (attributed weakly to Ibn ‘Abbās) that “*in every one of the seven earths there is a prophet like your Prophet, an Adam like your Adam, a Noah like your Noah...*”³⁴ , while not authoritative, imaginatively reflects this principle: any world with intelligent life would have its **own spiritual drama**, its own Adam, Noah, etc. Even if this particular narration is not reliable, the concept it conveys is that **God’s mercy and guidance are not confined to a single planet or species**. Islamic scholars like **Shoaib Ahmed Malik** in contemporary times have begun to explore these questions under the field of “**Islamic exotheology**”, pondering how core tenets (like the prophethood of Muhammad, human uniqueness, etc.) would interface with the existence of extraterrestrials³⁵ ³⁶ . A consensus is far from formed, but the very discussion underscores that Muslims can welcome scientific discoveries without fearing that faith will be undermined. On the contrary, new discoveries can lead to an **expanded understanding** of concepts already present in the Qur’an.

Finally, the notion of a populated cosmos can inspire a profound **spiritual humility**. We often consider humanity “special” – and indeed, the Qur’an does say humans were honored above many other creatures (Q.17:70). But seeing Earth as one life-bearing planet among billions helps prevent an arrogant, anthropocentric view. It reinforces the **Qur’anic ethos of humility**: “*Do not walk on the earth with insolence – you will never tear the earth apart, nor reach the mountains in height*” (Q.17:37). If tiny Earth itself is but a dot in a vast universe, how much smaller is each human in that scheme! And yet, from the Islamic perspective, this makes God’s attention to us all the more wondrous. In a universe so large, the Qur’an says “*Allah does not overlook [so much as] an atom’s weight*” in the heavens or earth (Q.34:3). Every individual soul, every good or evil deed, is known to Him³⁰ . The **grandeur of creation** amplifies the grandeur of the Creator. Muslims are thus encouraged to reflect: “*Who created the seven heavens one above another? ... You do not see any flaw in the Merciful’s creation. Look again – do you see any gaps?*” (Q.67:3-4). The more we learn about the cosmos, the more this verse rings true – the universe is an integrated whole, operating by laws of physics that extend across billions of light years, yet finely tuned to allow life on at least one world and possibly many more. The **interdisciplinary harmony** between Qur’anic cosmology and modern astrophysics can enrich one’s faith. It invites a synthesis wherein **science provides details of the “how”** of creation’s vastness, while **the Qur’an provides the “why”** – to know and worship the Creator across all worlds³⁰ ³⁷ .

Conclusion

Reading “seven heavens” in Qur’an 65:12 as a **metaphor for countless celestial realms** proves to be a fruitful approach that bridges scripture and science. It respects the classical Islamic affirmation that Allah’s creation is layered and far-reaching, yet it also embraces the modern revelation (through astronomy) that the universe contains an **unfathomable number of galaxies and planets**. The inclusion of Qur’an 51:47 about the “expanding” heaven reinforces that the Qur’an is compatible with a dynamic, vast cosmos ¹² . What emerges is a vision of the universe as **ever-expanding and teeming with “worlds”**, all under the dominion of the One God – a vision that is remarkably congruent with today’s scientific paradigm. This interdisciplinary commentary has shown that classical tafsīr, when read alongside contemporary knowledge, can yield an interpretation of *sab’a samāwāt* (seven heavens) that points beyond the number seven, towards **limitless plurality**.

Such an understanding carries meaningful **theological implications**. It suggests that Islamic cosmology is not a closed system tied to antiquated astronomy, but rather a **flexible framework** capable of encompassing new knowledge about the cosmos. Humanity, in this grand picture, is **decentralized but dignified**: we are one among many living communities in creation, yet endowed with the gifts of consciousness and guidance. The possibility of other life forms does not diminish our relationship with God; it simply adds new dimensions to God’s creative *āyāt* (signs) and challenges us to extend our ethical consideration (such as stewardship and compassion) beyond our own species, should we ever encounter His creatures from another world. In the Qur’anic worldview, **truth is universal** – applicable “whether there are one or a thousand nations (of creatures)” – and **Allah’s mercy extends to all** of them. Thus, exploring the stars and seeking other worlds can be seen as extending the horizon of tawḥīd (recognition of God’s oneness and lordship) across the cosmos.

In sum, Qur’an 65:12’s reference to “seven heavens” need not be seen as a cryptic ancient cosmology to be taken literally or an outdated concept to be dismissed. Instead, it can be appreciated as a **metaphorical archetype**: a phrase that conveyed to its first listeners the completeness of God’s created order, and which opens up for today’s readers the awe-inspiring possibility of **a universe filled with worlds upon worlds**. Backed by the Qur’an’s own hints of cosmic vastness and modern empirical discoveries of exoplanets, this interpretation enriches our understanding of the scripture. It demonstrates that Qur’anic theology, philosophy, and modern astrophysics need not clash; rather, they can **converge to illuminate the same truth** – that the creation is indeed as boundless as its Creator’s power, and that every new world we come to know only deepens our wonder at the “**Lord of the Worlds.**” ¹⁹ ²³

Sources:

- The Quran, **65:12** and **51:47**, with classical exegesis by Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and others ² ¹² .
- *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān* of Mufti Muhammad Shafī’, commentary on 65:12 (acknowledging possible creatures on other “earth”) ³⁸ .
- IslamQA Fatwa No. 192413 on Qur’an 65:12 (citing classical opinions on seven heavens/earths and discouraging speculation) ² ⁵ .
- Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s commentary (12th c.) on “*Lord of the Worlds*” and cosmic pluralism ¹⁹ ¹⁶ .
- Report of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir on “thousands of worlds and humankind” ¹⁸ .
- *Lamp of Islam* blog, “Meaning of ‘seven Heavens’” (on seven as “innumerable” in Arabic usage) ¹⁰ .
- Down-to-Earth Magazine: “*Life Beyond Earth*” (exoplanet statistics and quotes from Sagan/Drake) ³⁹

²⁶ .

- NASA Exoplanet Archive/Science articles (exoplanet counts and habitable zone findings) ²¹ ²³ ²⁴ .
- IslamiCity article “*Islam on Extraterrestrial Life*” by Hassam Munir (theological perspectives on aliens, citing Qur’an 42:29 and Rāzī) ¹⁴ ¹⁶ .
- Wikipedia: “Cosmic Pluralism” (overview of pluralist ideas in Islamic thought and beyond) ¹⁹ ¹⁵ .

¹ ² ³ ⁴ ⁵ ⁷ ²⁹ ³⁰ ³⁷ **Meaning of the verse “It is Allah Who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof” - Islam Question & Answer**

<https://islamqa.info/en/answers/192413>

⁶ ⁹ ³⁸ **Tafsir Surah At-Talaq - 12 - Quran.com**

<https://quran.com/en/65:12/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>

⁸ ¹³ ¹⁴ ¹⁶ ³¹ ³² ³³ ³⁴ **Islam on Extraterrestrial Life - IslamiCity**

<https://www.islamicity.org/68874/islam-on-extraterrestrial-life/>

¹⁰ **Meaning of ‘seven Heavens’ | Lamp of Islam**

<https://lampofislam.wordpress.com/2016/02/11/meaning-of-seven-heavens/>

¹¹ **Mistake In Quran Regarding Seven Heavens - Ask Ghamidi**

<https://ask.ghamidi.org/forums/discussion/61378/>

¹² **Tafheem-ul-Quran (En) - 51 : 47**

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