

Laughing and Crying in the Bible and Quran

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This study is concerned with laughing and crying in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran. It aims to examine the meanings of laughing and crying in religious texts and to show the similarities and differences of these meanings in the two texts. This study, then, reveals that both biblical and quranic texts make extensive use of words to express laughing and crying. In the Holy Bible, laughing implies worldly life, madness, foolishness, enjoyment, and birth. However, in the Glorious Quran, it indicates victory, pleasure and joy, warning, wonder, tolerance, deriding, questioning or rebuke, and the capability of Allah. Crying, on the other hand, entails purification, piety, supplication, and praying in the Holy Bible, and bounty, faith and perceiving realities, sign of wisdom, deep grief, and sometimes deceit in the Glorious Quran.

Keywords: *Laughing, Crying, Holy Bible, Glorious Quran.*

Introduction

This study is concerned with the meanings of "laughing" and "crying" in religious texts, precisely in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the meanings of "laughing" and "crying" in the Holy Bible?
2. What are the meanings of "laughing" and "crying" in the Glorious Quran?
3. What are the major similarities and differences of such meanings?

The study aims at:

1. Investigating the meanings of "laughing" and "crying" in the Holy Bible.
2. Identifying the meanings of both "laughing" and "crying" in the Glorious Quran.

3. Detecting the major similarities and differences of the meanings of "laughing" and "crying" in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran.

The study hypothesises that:

1. In the Holy Bible, "laughing" means worldly life, madness, foolishness, enjoyment, and birth. "Crying", on the other hand, denotes purification, piety, supplication, and praying.
2. In the Glorious Quran, "laughing" indicates victory, pleasure and joy, warning, wonder, tolerance, deriding, and questioning or rebuke. "Crying", alternatively, brings about bounty, faith and perceiving realities, sign of wisdom, and sometimes deceit.
3. "Laughing" and "crying" have different meanings, although they have some similarities in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran.

Religious Text

Religious text has a unique style because the language of religion turns into the standard version of the language used, such as the language of the Glorious Quran, the Holy Bible, Hadith, Sermons, and other religious texts, and it is directed to given individuals in a given environment as a means to direct and guide the life of the intended individuals (Morris, 1971: 225).

The Concepts of "Laughing" and "Crying"

Generally speaking, "laughing" and "crying" can be viewed as non-lexical components in an interaction which do not have linguistic construction but an acoustic construction, with no readily apparent semantic or syntactic features (O'Donnell-Trujillo & Adams, 1983: 175).

Laughing and crying are the ideal ways to release emotions. In their general senses, laughing is a sign of happiness, while crying is a sign of sadness. However, different words can express laughing and crying and their meanings in various texts. These meanings are certainly not the only available ones because various meanings of laughing and crying can be triggered if we reflect upon the context. A closer look at several extracts from the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran serve to illustrate some meanings of laughing and crying in these religious texts. It is worth noting that the biblical extracts are taken from different books of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. For the sake of clarity and comparison, the analysis starts with laughing in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Quran, and then with crying in both texts. The extracts are numbered in sequence for distinction and ease of reference.

Laughing in the Holy Bible

Ex. No. 1: A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes, 3: 4)

This extract is built primarily on parallel structures which involve a contrast of weeping versus laughing and mourning versus dancing to show the ceaseless toil and repetition in the natural world and the worldly life. It is a call to accept the life given by Allah and enjoy it as it is. In other words, the events that are controlled by Allah have a fixed order. In view of this, all human efforts to improve life is useless. People can change nothing. In this regard, laughing here portrays the condition of **worldly life**.

Ex. No. 2: Laughter, I said, is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish? (Ecclesiastes, 2: 2)

This extract describes the experiences of a truly wise and wealthy man who searched for a meaning to life, which led only to misery and frustration. His life experiences enabled him to tell the difference between wisdom and folly, but they were unable to help him to find a meaning to life. Continuing his search, the man had experienced pleasures of various kinds, but they did not provide the answer for him (Fleming, 2005: 248). As a result "laughing" is described as **madness**.

Ex. No. 3: Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless (Ecclesiastes, 7: 6)

Laughing is the characteristic of fools and **foolishness**. It indicates stupidity and a lack of good wisdom, sense, or judgement. Fools speak and laugh without thinking of the consequences of their words and so they get themselves into trouble.

Ex. No. 4: A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything (Ecclesiastes, 10: 19)

If people want to enjoy the good things of life, they must work so that they can earn the money to buy them. Consequently, this verse is a call for **enjoyment** in life.

Ex. No. 5: Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (Genesis, 21: 6)

As Prophet Abraham and Sarah grew older, Allah promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. Abraham felt, in view of his and Sarah's old age, that this was almost too much to

expect (Fleming, 2005: 18). After the birth of Isaac, Sarah, his mother, describes him as laughter to express her happiness and amazement, so "laughing" is accompanied with **birth**.

Laughing in the Glorious Quran

Laughing in the Glorious Quran has several different meanings, as the following quranic verses show:

Ex. No. 6:

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ (المطففين: 34)
But on this Day the Believers will laugh at the Unbelievers (Ali, 2002: 443).

The disbelievers arrogantly laughed at the believers to insult them. However, in the Hereafter, the tables will be turned. This is because the Day of Judgment is a day that everyone will receive the results of his own deeds which he incurred in this world and Allah will reveal the goodness or the falsehood of people (الطبرسي, 1997: 456). That is why the believers will laugh at the unbelievers where laughing, itself, is a kind of painful punishment for the arrogant ones. Hence, laughing is the real **victory** in this context.

Ex. No.7:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفَرَةٌ <u>ضَاحِكَةٌ</u> مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكُفَّرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ (عبس: 42-38)
Some faces that Day will be beaming. Laughing, rejoicing. And other faces that Day will be dust-stained. Blackness will cover them. Such will be the Rejecters of Allah, the doers of iniquity. (Ali, 2002: 438).

Regarding people's faces on the Day of Judgment, the Glorious Quran divides people into two groups as the above verse shows. Thus, on the Day of Judgment, the reality of every person will appear on his face (الحر العاملي, 1993: 402). On that day, some faces are bright, laughing, and joyful, whereas other faces are dusty, burdened, and dust-stained. In this respect, laughing means pleasure and joy in this context.

Ex. No. 8:

فَلْيَضْحَكُوا قَلِيلًا وَلْيَبْكُوا كَثِيرًا جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (التوبة: 82)
Let them laugh a little: much will they weep: a recompense for the (evil) that they do. (Ali, 2002:122).

This quranic verse warns the disbelievers as they can laugh a little in the world, but they will cry a lot in hell as a result of their actions. It is directed to the hypocrites at the time of

Prophet Muhammad, who used to avoid fighting in battles against the enemies of Islam and they also encouraged others to do so, on the pretext that the weather was too hot:

وَقَالُوا لَا تَنْفِرُوا فِي الْحَرِّ قُلْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ أَشَدُّ حَرًّا لَوْ كَانُوا يَفْقَهُونَ (التوبة: 81)
They said, "Go not forth in the heat". Say, the fire of Hell is fiercer in heat. If only they could understand! (Ali, 2002:122).

Thus, Extract 8 shows that laughing less and weeping more are kinds of punishment for the disbelievers and hypocrites and they will not get comfort from their grief and sorrow, even for a moment. Consequently, this verse is a **warning**.

Ex. No. 9:

وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحَكَتْ فَبَشَّرْنَاهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ (هود: 71)
And his wife was standing (there), and she laughed: But we gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob (Ali, 2002:140).

Prophet Abraham and Sarah were too old to have a son, but Allah promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. Apparently, Abraham had not been able to convince Sarah that she would have a son, so Allah sent his messengers to her directly, as she had to share Abraham's faith (الطبري, 1954: 167). When she heard their speech, she laughed as a kind of wonder.

Ex. No. 10:

فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكًا مِّن قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ (النمل: 19)
So he smiled, amused at her speech; and he said: "O my Lord! so order me that I may be grateful for Thy favours, which thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please Thee: And admit me, by Thy Grace, to the ranks of Thy righteous Servants" (Ali, 2002: 256).

One of the principles and conditions of leadership and administration is tolerance. Prophet Solomon has the grace of hearing the language spoken by animals and he heard what the ant said about him and his troops so he only smiled (الطبرسي, 1997: 456). This smile delivers the message that criticism must be heard from anyone and it must be received, because accepting criticism is a value. Thus, Solomon admired the words of the ant and smiled to express tolerance and to express his gratitude for the blessings of Allah.

Ex. No. 11:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يَضْحَكُونَ (الزخرف: 47)
But when he came to them with Our Signs, behold they ridiculed them (Ali, 2002: 348).

Prophet Moses told people that he had been sent by Allah and he presented his walking stick and his shining hand as proofs of his prophethood. Pharaoh and his followers, instead of using their intellect to distinguish between sorcery and miracle and acknowledge his prophethood, they derided him by laughing (الطباطبائي, 1997: 268). As such, "laughing" in this verse means deriding.

Other verses with similar meanings are found in Extracts 12 and 13:

Ex. No. 12:

فَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُمْ سِخْرِيًّا حَتَّىٰ أَنْسَوْكُمْ ذِكْرِي وَكُنْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ تَضْحَكُونَ (المؤمنون: 110)

But ye treated them with ridicule, so much so that (ridicule of) them made you forget My Message while ye were laughing at them! (Ali, 2002: 233).

Ex. No. 13:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ (المطففين: 29)

Those in sin used to laugh at those who believed (Ali, 2002: 443).

Ex. No.14:

أَفَمِنْ هَذَا الْحَدِيثِ تَعْجَبُونَ وَتَضْحَكُونَ وَلَا تَبْكُونَ (النجم: 59-60)

Do ye then wonder at this recital? And will ye laugh and not weep (Ali, 2002: 379).

In the above verse, "laughing" is accompanied with questioning and rebuke. The interrogative particle (همزة) in (أَفَمِنْ) forms a rhetorical question. The verse means "Are you not surprised at this account of the torments and afflictions sent down upon them? Do you deride the news of the Day of Resurrection drawing near?" Instead, one should be weeping out of awe and grief. Hence, crying is considered as a remedy for those who have gone astray.

Ex. No. 15:

نَهْ هُوَ أَضْحَاكَ وَأَبْكَا وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَمَاتَ وَأَحْيَا وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ (النجم: 43-45)

That it is He Who granteth Laughter and Tears. That it is He Who granteth Death and Life. That He did create in pairs,- male and female (Ali, 2002: 379).

In Al-Najim Surah above, there is an amazing amalgamation of laugh and cry, life and death, and the masculinity and femininity as evidence of the endless and supreme capability of Allah, who created all things. Allah makes people laugh and cry. It is only Allah who has the power to make people laugh and make them cry. Laughing, in this sense, expresses the **capability of Allah** to give man the ability to laugh and cry as ways of expressing the internal feelings of happiness and sadness, respectively (الطبري, 1954: 367).

Crying in the Holy Bible

In fact, many times Allah is pleased by the attitudes and emotions behind the crying and shedding of tears of the faithful people in the Holy Bible, as the following discussions show:

Ex. No. 16: Crying is better than laughing. It blotches the face but it scours the heart (Ecclesiastes, 7: 3)

Crying removes dirt from the hearts of people, as if crying were washing and cleaning the heart to purify it. In view of this, crying is a kind of **purification** and people should always bear in mind the certainty of death, and they should not waste their lives on empty pleasures. Thus, this biblical verse can be taken as a proverb about life.

Ex. No. 17: In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His piety (Hebrews, 5: 7)

This biblical verse refers to the time when *Jesus Christ* was in the Garden of Gethsemane before going to the cross. He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying. His prayers were accepted by Allah because they reflected his piety (Fleming, 2005: 651). Crying, thus, expresses **piety** in this context.

Ex. No. 18: Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice, And be gracious to me and answer me (Psalm 27:7)

This line is a **supplication** by means of crying and it is spoken by David, who is well known as the premier psalmist who is expressing the gamut of human emotions and prophetic references to the coming Messiah. He prays that Allah will hear his prayers and never turn away from him. Others might reject him, but he is confident that Allah's care of him will never fail (Fleming, 2005: 205-6). Another extract with similar meaning is the following:

Ex. No. 19: Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears (Psalm 39: 12)

Ex. No. 20: Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice (Psalm 55: 17)

In the above extract, the beginning parameters for the times of praying are set forth and, hence, crying is accompanied with faithful **praying**. In his distress, Jesus Christ turns to

Allah by praying and crying so his faith awakens. He knows that Allah will save those who trust him, and overthrow those who deliberately ignore him.

Crying in the Glorious Quran

Crying is an important theme in the Glorious Quran. Shedding tears reveals certain secrets, which can be clarified in the following quranic verses:

Ex. No. 21:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا (مريم: 58)

Those were some of the prophets on whom Allah did bestow His Grace, of the posterity of Adam, and of those who We carried with Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel of those whom We guided and chose. Whenever the Signs of Allah. Most Gracious were rehearsed to them, they would fall down in prostrate adoration and in tears (Ali, 2002: 203).

Crying for fear of Allah is an extremely important theme for Muslims because it makes them feel closer to Allah through crying and shedding tears. This verse portrays the prophets in prostration when they read the Glorious Quran as a kind of worshiping of Allah. They all share the **bounty** of crying and shedding tears when hearing the Quran. According to الطوسي (1959: 317), the word "من" in this verse indicates that not all prophets receive that special divine blessing from Allah, but only the chosen ones who hold an exceptional high rank will attain that privilege. This verse displays the honour which prophets have in their relation to other prophets before them, according to their lineage (الطباطبائي, 1997: 168).

Ex. No. 22:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ الْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ (المائدة: 83)

And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray:
"Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the Witnesses (Ali, 2002:75).

Although the word "crying" does not exist, its meaning is implicitly stated by the verse. Some Christians, when listening to the Glorious Quran, shed tears so that their eyes are overflowing and filled as a result of fear, respect, abundance, and humility to the words of Allah. In this sense, crying is a sign of **faith** and **perceiving realities** (الطوسي, 1959: 182).

Ex. No. 23:

قُلْ آمَنُوا بِهِ أَوْ لَا تُؤْمِنُوا إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ إِذَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ يَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ سُجَّدًا وَيَقُولُونَ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنْ كَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّنَا لَمَفْعُولًا وَيَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ يَبْكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعًا (الإسراء: 107-109)

Say: "Whether ye believe in it or not, it is true that those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them, fall down on their faces in humble prostration, and they say: Glory to our Lord! Truly has the promise of our Lord been fulfilled! They fall down on their faces in tears, and it increases their humility" (Ali, 2002: 190).

Crying is one of the best commendable acts. This proves that crying in the court of Allah increases humility and thus, increases the approval and status of the believer's deeds. This verse is directed to those who are given knowledge:

"إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ". This is an inspiring image showing people endowed with knowledge listening to Allah's words and falling down on their faces in humble prostration. They cannot restrain themselves from falling down on their faces in complete humility to express their feeling of fear (الطباطبائي, 1997: 178). The word "fall" shows the fall of the body because it evokes a submission to Allah. As such, crying is a **sign of wisdom**.

Ex. No. 24:

وَجَاءُوا آبَاءَهُمْ عِشَاءَ يَبْكُونَ (يوسف: 16)

Then they came to their father in the early part of the night, weeping (Ali, 2002: 145).

Unlikely on some other occasions, crying is neither sincere nor a sign of honesty. It cannot always be trusted. Sometimes, conspirators do not neglect to take into consideration the role of feelings. Yusuf's brothers executed their plot flawlessly as they planned against him. Then, they had to think about their return, their father's questions, and how to make him believe their lies. The lie they cooked up was the same fear which their father expressed and predicted, proclaiming that Prophet Yusuf was eaten by wolves. The brothers went to their father at night, crying. This kind of crying expresses **deceit** and it is pretend, which shows that they cried without a valid and an honest reason, but as reinforcement of their lie.

Ex. No. 25:

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنِّيَصَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٍ (يوسف: 84)

And he turned away from them, and said: "How great is my grief for Joseph!" And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy. (Ali, 2002: 145).

Prophet Jacob cried due to the separation from his son, Prophet Joseph. He cried so much that his eyes became blind. This was the crying of a prophet, over his living son. He cried so much, therefore, he lost his sight through crying (الطوسي, 1959: 281). On this ground, crying expresses deep grief.

Conclusion

Both biblical and quranic texts make an extensive use of words to express "laughing" and "crying", with various extended meanings. In the Holy Bible, "laughing" implies a worldly life, madness, foolishness, enjoyment, and birth. However, in the Glorious Quran, "laughing" indicates victory, pleasure and joy, warning, wonder, tolerance, deriding, questioning or rebuke, and the capability of Allah. As far as "crying" is concerned, it entails purification, piety, supplication, and praying in the Holy Bible, and bounty, faith and perceiving realities, sign of wisdom, deep grief, and sometimes deceit in the Glorious Quran.

In both religious texts, crying and shedding tears have been given a special value and they are considered as a sign of God or Allah's mercy. Crying out of fear of God or Allah illuminates and softens the hearts in such a way that it brings prosperity and deliverance from God or Allah's punishment. Consequently, the hypotheses set at the beginning of this paper have been validated. These meanings can be briefly portrayed in the following table:

The Holy Bible		The Glorious Quran	
Laughing	Crying	Laughing	Crying
Worldly Life	Purification	Victory	Bounty
Madness	Piety	Pleasure and Joy	Faith and Perceiving Reality
Foolishness	Supplication	Warning	Sign of Wisdom
Enjoyment	Praying	Wonder	Deceit
Birth		Tolerance	Deep Grief
		Deriding	
		Questioning and Rebuke	
		Capability of Allah	

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